

Randomized Control Trials on the Effect of Emotional Freedom Technique in Reducing Empty Nest Symptoms in Empty Nest Mothers

¹Ayesha Razaqat

²Dr. Muhammad Naveed Riaz

³Dr. Sadia Malik

¹Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, 40100, Pakistan / Lecturer of Psychology, Lahore School of Behavioural sciences, University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus 40100, Pakistan

²Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, 40100, Pakistan

³Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, 40100, Pakistan

ayesha.rafaqat@psy.uol.edu.pk

Abstract

Objective: The experimental study based on randomized control trials aimed to examine the effect of Emotional Freedom Technique in reducing empty nest symptoms in empty nest mothers. **Methods:** The study used Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) Design with a sample of empty nest mothers (N = 100) with an age ranged 34-60 [1] years. Empty nest mothers were randomly assigned to experimental group (n=50, 50%) and control group (n=50, 50%) using systematic random sampling. Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire [2] was twice administered on mothers in pre-post experiment to measure empty nest syndrome. **Results:** Analysis through mixed ANOVA revealed that the symptoms of empty nest syndrome reduced in the experimental group after the administration of emotional freedom technique as compare to before administration. Furthermore, emotional freedom technique significantly reduced symptoms of empty nest syndrome in the experimental group compared to the control group. The study underscores the importance of emotional freedom intervention in reducing empty nest syndrome.

Conclusion: Present study has concluded that emotional freedom technique helps to alleviate symptoms of empty nest syndrome in empty nest mothers.

Keywords: Empty nest syndrome, emotional freedom technique, randomized controlled trial, empty nest mothers.

Article Details:

Received on 14 Feb, 2026

Accepted on 02 March, 2026

Published on 04 March, 2026

Corresponding Authors*

Ayesha Razaqat

INTRODUCTION

It became so traumatizing for parents when young children left the family to live independently and left them alone at home. The time when children leave home and live apart from the initial close-knit family causes parents to feel lonely and depressed [3,4]. Even though they no longer have to worry about the financial and emotional costs of caring for their children, they still have other needs, like the desire for attention, the need for assistance with their day-to-day activities, and the sense that they are missing out on children. Empty Nest Syndrome is a persistent pervasive sense of loneliness, sadness, or grief parents, especially mothers, experience when their children leave home. According to [5] The behavioral symptoms of empty nest syndrome may include feeling anxious for a long time, being constantly sad, being alone, feeling worthless, feeling completely empty in life, disturbed marital life, poor decisions making power. [6] Parents especially women become depressed when their children leave their homes forever.

Researchers [7] investigated the efficacy of treating Empty Nest Syndrome with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Their findings show improvements in cognitive flexibility and emotional self-regulation, out of several adjuvant therapies. Emotional Freedom Technique developed by Gary Craig in 1990s, was also found to be successful in treating psychological distress [8]. Known as tapping or psychological acupressure, this non-invasive procedure uses the tips of the fingers to stimulate energy points on the body to heal emotional pain, physical distress, and diseases. It is based on the theory that any disturbance in the body's energy flow results in negative emotions; by tapping on certain meridians with positive affirmations, the energy flow will be re-channelized, relieving the psychological distress [9]. Similar to acupuncture, emotional freedom technique and acupoint tapping are believed to down-regulate limbic system activity. Reduced blood flow (meaning decreased activity) was found in multiple brain regions linked to memory and stress response, including the amygdala, hippocampus, and nucleus accumbent, in a functional magnetic resonance imaging study of patients receiving hand acupuncture [10,11,12]. Emotional freedom technique can be applied as a self-help method when judged suitable by a psychotherapist or as a supplement to clinician-guided therapy. Typically, the method may be learned in a single session [13]. One of the effective treatments that focuses on improving psychological characteristics is the emotional freedom technique. Although Emotional Freedom Technique can be used to treat depression and other mental health issues, it seems to be especially effective for anxiety, possibly due to the technique's exposure component [14,15].

METHODS

This study employs randomized controlled trial (RCTs) to investigate the effectiveness of Emotional Freedom Technique on reducing empty nest syndrome. Sample of the study consisted of empty nest mothers ($N = 100$), aged 34 to 60 years ($M = 22$, $SD = 3.74$). Data were collected from various neighborhoods in cities of Punjab including Sargodha, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Gujrat, and Wazirabad through simple random sampling technique which was further randomly assignment to experimental group ($n=50$, 50%) and control group ($n=50$, 50%) through systematic random sampling.

For the assessment and screening purpose, Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire [2] was used in the present study. The Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire comprised of 16 items. In Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire item no 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 are positively scored whereas item no 4, 7, 9, 16 are reversely scored. The few examples of the reverse items include in the scale are "seeing all of them once a year is good enough" and "with the exit of all my children I feel younger than in now". Some positively scored items are followed as "my

children have stayed very long away from the house”. “I need to see my children every week”. The scale contains 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *Strongly agree* to 5= *strongly disagree*. Scored range from 1 to 10. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of scale is .81. A clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria was used. Only those empty nest mothers were included whose score higher on empty nest syndrome questionnaire. Specific cut off scores was used for screening. Besides the screening criteria, it was ensured that the empty nest mothers must have their children shifted abroad permanently, their husbands must be alive and living with them and they must have grandchildren. Moreover, uneducated empty next mothers, mothers living in the extended families, mothers whose children left home to pursue their career in other cities, and polygamous families were also excluded from the sample.

The study was approved by the Board of Studies at the University of Sargodha. Ethical guidelines of American Psychological Association were strictly followed throughout the research. Participants were briefed about study and its purpose. The comprehensive procedure of the research in given beneath in Fig.1.

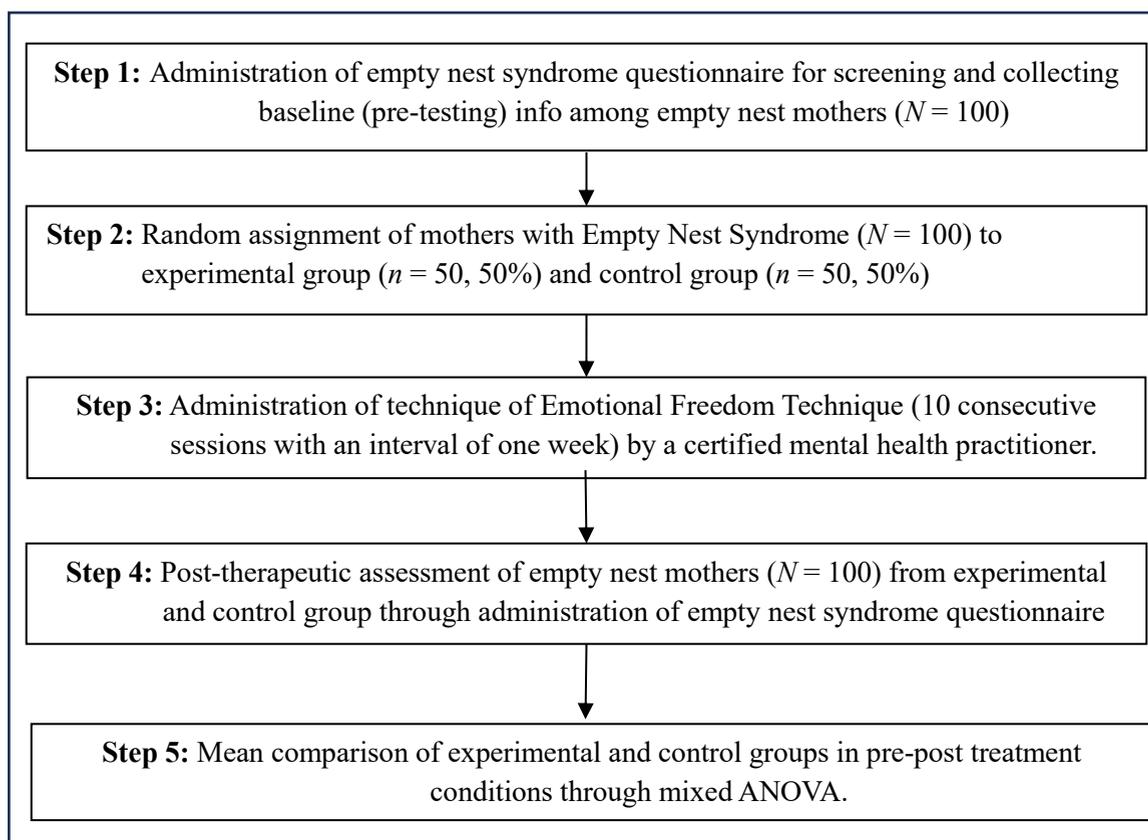


Fig.1: Schematic representation of effect of emotional freedom technique on empty nest mothers

RESULTS

Table I: Demographic Characteristic of Mothers with Empty Nest Syndrome

Characteristics	n	%	Characteristics	n	%
Age			Residence		
34-42 years	15	15.0	Rural	58	58.0
43-51 years	45	45.0	Urban	42	42.0
52-60 years	40	40.0	Family System		
Education			Joint	39	39.0
Matric	50	50.0	Nuclear	61	61.0

FA/Fsc	17	17.0
BA/Bsc	22	22.0
MA/Msc	11	11.0

Table 1 shows frequency and percentage of empty nest syndrome in mothers with respect to age, education, residence and family system. Greater number of age group 43-51years ($n = 45, 45.0\%$) as compare to 52-60 years ($n = 40, 40.0\%$) and 34-42 years ($n = 15, 15.0\%$). Greater number of matric ($n = 50, 50.0\%$) pass participants as compared to FA/Fsc ($n = 17, 17.0\%$), BA/B.Sc. ($n = 22, 22.0\%$) and MA/Msc. ($n = 11, 11.0\%$). Greater number of rural ($n = 58, 58\%$) as compared to urban ($n = 42, 42\%$). Greater number nuclear family system ($n = 61, 61\%$) as compare to joint family system ($n = 39, 39\%$).

Table II: Mean, Standard Deviation and Mixed ANOVA Statistics

Variables	Conditions	Pre-experiment		Post-experiment		ANOVA			
		M	SD	M	SD	Effect	F-Ratio	df	η^2
Empty nest syndrome	Experimental group	44.50	6.85	38.80	7.83	Conditions	12.55***	1	0.11
	Control group	44.02	7.46	43.02	7.78				
						x groups			

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2 shows effects of conditions with $F(1,99) = 12.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ and conditions x groups $F(1,99) = 6.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ on empty nest syndrome. Mean scores of experimental group on empty nest syndrome in pre-experiment condition were decreased in post-experiment condition. Mean scores of control group on empty nest syndrome in pre-experiment condition were slightly decreased in post-experiment condition. The value of η^2 for conditions was .11 and conditions x groups was .06 which indicates medium effect size.

DISCUSSION

The current study aims to examine the effect of treatment intervention of Emotional Freedom Technique for reducing empty nest syndrome in empty nest mothers. Result have shown that Emotional Freedom Technique significantly reduced empty nest syndrome in mothers with empty nest. The research design for this study was randomized control trial (RCT). The internal consistency of Empty Nest Syndrome Questionnaire was above satisfactory which indicted that scale used in the study was reliable.

The first hypothesis “the symptoms of empty nest syndrome will reduce in the experimental group after the administration of emotional freedom technique as compare to Empty Nest Syndrome symptoms before the administration of emotional freedom technique” was supported by the results of study as findings are consistent with past empirical and theoretical evidence. A study conducted by [16] found that the emotional freedom technique aids parents with empty nest syndrome in reducing psychological distress and enhancing emotional regulation. Another study by Church D. et al. looked at the efficacy of the Emotional Freedom Technique for reducing psychological distress in participants who had experienced psychological trauma. They found that participants' levels of psychological distress significantly decreased after receiving six hours of Emotional Freedom Technique sessions along with standard care. They found that Emotional Freedom Technique reduces anxiety and depression in individual who undergoes through tapping session. This reduction in symptoms is particular to empty nest syndrome symptoms, i.e. isolation, worthlessness, feeling completely empty in life. [17] Empty nest syndrome has a significant emotional impact, and it can have long-term psychological effects if a person does not have a coping mechanism

or if the right help is not provided. The second hypothesis “The symptoms of Emotional Freedom Technique will reduce in the experimental group after the administration of Emotional Freedom Technique as compared to control group” was consistent with past empirical evidence. Emotional freedom technique specially benefits adults who're affected by empty nest syndrome with the aid of addressing the emotional distress this is related to isolation, worthlessness, guilt, separation and loss. [18] Through tapping individuals release negative energy, negative thoughts and reframe their notion of situation, leading to better emotional regulation and reduction in symptoms. Emotional regulation is fundamental assemble inside the intellectual health of the aged with empty nest syndrome, which determines their capability to adapt to pressures and threats. Studies have shown that emotional regulation is related to success in going thru special levels of existence or failure to go through these degrees. It expresses a wide range of conscious and unconscious biological, social, behavioral and cognitive processes, which is known as the central point of an effective function in controlling internal states, controlling impulses and behaviors. According to [19] a technique that merges the body's energy system with spiritual healing, utilizing a tapping method applied to specific points on the body. These elements collectively yielded a positive impact, leading to a reduction in distress levels experienced by patients and fostering improvements in their physical, biological, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) in reducing empty nest symptoms in empty nest mothers. Present study has concluded that emotional freedom technique helps to alleviate symptoms of empty nest syndrome in empty nest mothers. The study's findings suggest that Emotional freedom technique can be a valuable intervention for alleviating emotional distress and promoting well-being of empty nesters. findings support the integration of EFT into mental health services and support programs for empty nest mothers. Further studies can explore the mechanisms underlying Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) effectiveness and its potential applications in other populations experiencing similar life transitions.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Smaller sample size may limit external validity; future studies are needed to address this methodological weakness and investigate the applicability and effects of Emotional Freedom Technique using larger and more diverse samples. This study targets a particular population, the empty-nest mothers instead of empty next parents. Thus, inclusion of empty nest fathers can extend the validity of the findings. Follow-ups were not conducted to determine the long-term sustainable effects of Emotional Freedom Technique on empty nest mother. Therefore, the long-term impact of Emotional Freedom Technique is unclear. It is suggested that individual get training before practicing Emotional Freedom Technique on patients

IMPLICATIONS

Clinicians can use Emotional Freedom Technique to educate participants about psychological aspects of empty nest syndrome, promoting awareness and proactive management of their mental health and wellbeing. This study will help clinicians taking initiatives to increase awareness and understanding of psychological intervention for empty nest syndrome. By addressing symptoms of empty nest syndrome i.e., depression, anxiety, isolation and guilt, Emotional freedom technique can potentially prevent the development of chronic mental health issues that otherwise arise if the symptoms are left untreated. Emotional Freedom Technique helps empty nest mothers to develop resilience. It equips them with strategies to

manage stress, anxiety effectively, which can contribute to their overall wellbeing and ability to handle future challenges.

Acknowledgements: Scale authors and participants are appreciated.

Funding: None.

Data Availability Statement: Data used in this research can be reproduced on request, through sending an email to the article's corresponding author.

Ethical Approval: This study protocol was reviewed by Advance Board of Studies and Research from University of Sargodha. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of American Psychological Association.

Inform consent All participants signed informed consent.

Declaration Of Conflicting Interest: None.

REFERENCES

1. Newman BM, Newman PR. Development through life: A psychosocial approach. Dorsey; 1975.
2. Mbaeze IC, Ukwandu E. Empty-nest syndrome, gender, and family size as a predictor of aged's adjustment pattern. *Pak J Soc Sci.* 2011;8(4):166-71. <https://doi.org/10.3923/pjssci.2011.166.171>
3. Bouchard G. How do parents react when their children leave the home? An integrative review. *J Adult Dev.* 2014;21(2):69-79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-013-9180-8>
4. Hardy R. Advice for parents: How to say goodbye when your child leaves home [Internet]. *The Guardian*; 2013 Sep 18 [cited 2025 May 16]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/18/parents-coping-when-children-leave-home>
5. Abraham S. Ageing successfully for managing empty nest syndrome. *Help Age India-Res Dev J.* 2012;18(2):39-41.
6. Piya MC, Birgid M. Empty-nest syndrome. *Pondicherry J Nurs.* 2014;7(3):16-8. <https://doi.org/10.5005/pjn-7-3-16>
7. Mahmoudpour A, Ferdousi Kejani K, Karami M, Toosi M, Ahmadboukani S. Cognitive flexibility and emotional self-regulation of the elderly with Empty Nest Syndrome: Benefits of acceptance and commitment therapy. *Health Sci Rep.* 2023;6:e187.
8. A brief history of EFT, in a nutshell [Internet]. From Stressed to Calm; 2020 [cited 2025 May 16]. Available from: <https://fromstressedtocalm.com/history/>
9. Quinn S. Emotional freedom technique [Internet]. Good Therapy; 2018 [cited 2025 May 16]. Available from: <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/emotional-freedom-technique>
10. Fang J, Jin Z, Wang Y, Li K, Kong J, Nixon EE, et al. The salient characteristics of the central effects of acupuncture needling: Limbic-paralimbic-neocortical network modulation. *Hum Brain Mapp.* 2009;30:1196-206. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbm.20516>
11. Hui KK, Liu J, Makris N, Gollub RL, Chen AJ, Moore CI, et al. Acupuncture modulates the limbic system and subcortical gray structures of the human brain: Evidence from fMRI studies in normal subjects. *Hum Brain Mapp.* 2000;9:13-25. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0193\(200007\)9:1<13::AID-HBM4>3.0.CO;2-A](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0193(200007)9:1<13::AID-HBM4>3.0.CO;2-A)
12. Hui KK, Liu J, Marina O, Napadow V, Haselgrove C, Kwong KK, et al. The integrated response of the human cerebro-cerebellar and limbic systems to acupuncture stimulation at ST 36 as evidenced by fMRI. *NeuroImage.* 2005;27:479-96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2005.04.016>

13. Church D. The effect of EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) on psychological symptoms in addiction treatment: A pilot study. *J Sci Res Rep.* 2013;2:315-23.
14. Fox L. Is acupoint tapping an active ingredient or an inert placebo in emotional freedom techniques (EFT)? A randomized controlled dismantling study. *Energy Psychol J.* 2013;5:15-26.
15. Wells S, Polglase K, Andrews HB, Carrington P, Baker AH. Evaluation of a meridian-based intervention, emotional freedom techniques (EFT), for reducing specific phobias of small animals. *J Clin Psychol.* 2003;59:943-66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.10188>
16. Dawson M, Church D. *EFT for PTSD and emotional healing: Research and applications.* Santa Rosa (CA): Energy Psychology Press; 2013.
17. Church D, Hawk C, Brooks AJ, Toukolehto O, Wren M, Dinter I, psychological trauma symptom improvement in veterans using emotional freedom techniques. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 2013;201(2):153-60. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e31827a5c25>
18. Feinstein D. The clinical effects of emotional freedom techniques (EFT) on psychological problems. *Energy Psychol Theory Res Treat.* 2010;2(1):21-38.
19. Zainuddin AF. *Spiritual emotional freedom technique (SEFT).* Kuala Lumpur: Afzan Publishing; 2012. p. 3-65.