

## **Overview of the empty nesters**

“Empty nester” refers to the elderly who are generally over 70 years old, have no children to care for, live alone or couples. They are divided into three situations: some have no children without wives; some have children but live alone, and some must have kept empty nests for their children are far away from the field. In general, they are a group of elderly people who LACK companionship.

Today, as the “aging generation” approaches, not only has increased the entire elderly population, but a growing group among the old—empty nesters—has greatly expanded.

“As report showed, from 2000 to 2010, the proportion of empty nesters among the whole population in China increased from 42% to 54%,” the Lianhe Zaobao noted, “we predicted that empty nesters will even occupy about 90% of the old in society.

Yet, this emerging as well as growing group is gradually fading away in front of people eyes, which are exposed in other stimulating news; increasingly more empty nesters have depression and other psychological diseases, detach from their children, and lock themselves in their loneliness...

## **HOW DO WE FIND THIS CROWD OF EMPTY NESTERS ?**

### **Talk between words and deeds**

Best example usually comes from our surrounding. In community of one of our members’, we fortunately have a couple of empty nesters to interview: Mr.Gao and Mrs.Li. “My

son almost devotes most of his time and energy on his job and works in his company until midnight...” says this old couple, who lives in Zhenjiang City ,and they usually have two people at home. Their daughter-in-law works in Nanjing and

their granddaughter also studies abroad. It is good to come back once in a year. This couple usually lives in a frugal style—— their children's alimonies are hardly used. Despite their thrifty habits, their savings for a lifetime are only a hundred thousand. Getting up early, cooking , cleaning the rooms, and going out to participate in square dance at night, all of these make up their daily life. They never complain about anything and never take the initiative to call their loved ones.

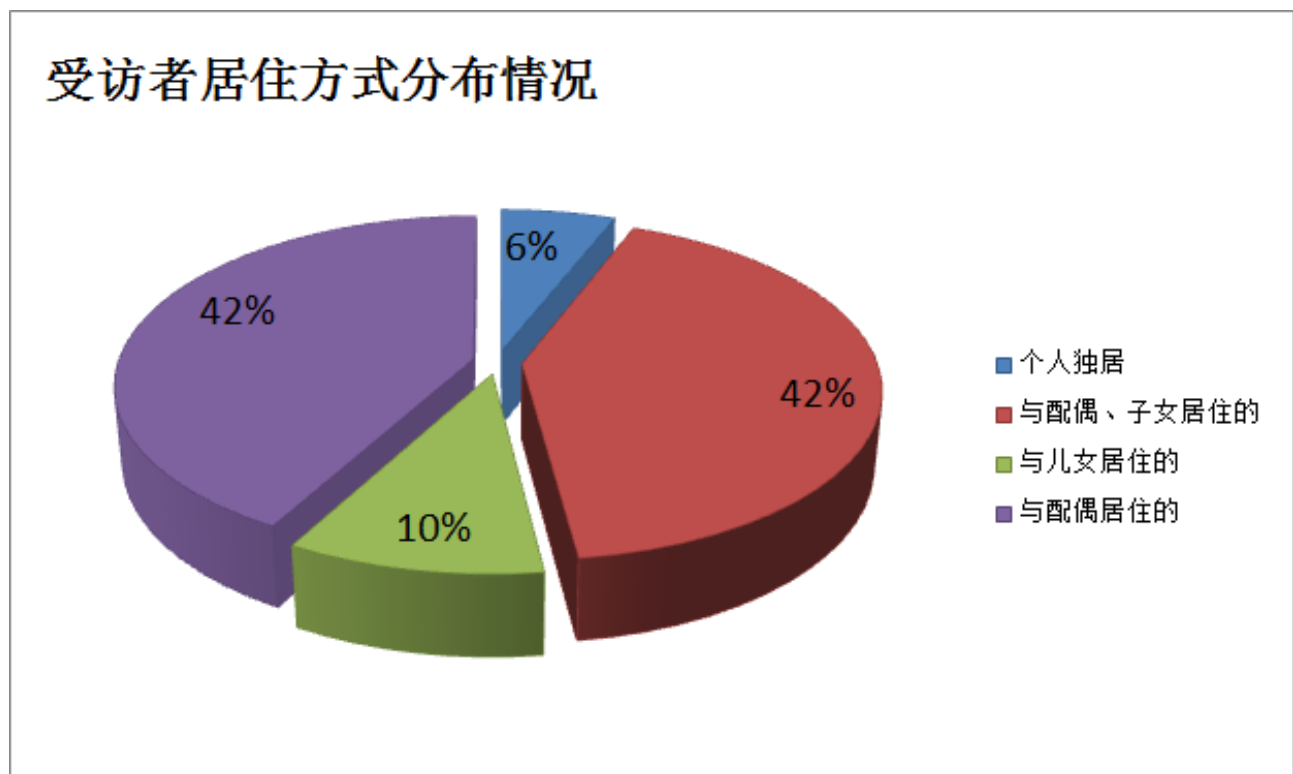
“we always wait for my kids to contact us each time.After taking the call, we are very happy and always ask whether they are going well, remind them of the importance of their work and study, etc...and” they paused and smiled, “we never tell them we have something wrong immediately so that they can be more likely to focus on what they should care about.”

According to the neighbor, the old couple always talks about their children, says how good the jobs their kids work on are and how smart their granddaughter is .Every time I talk about the children coming back to see them, they start to have a smile and there will be more words.This day has been more than four years.

(the graph shows that, among all participants, 6%of them live alone; 42% of them live with their spouses; 42% of them stay with kids and spouses; 10% of them stay with their kids.)

## **TRUE CALL OF HEART**

“Our children are successful and we really take pride in them,” said Mr. Gao and he continued, “although we still hope that they can squeeze their time to accompany



with us, this requirement will probably lay too much pressure on them and I cannot become their burden or disrupt them...”

Now most empty-nest people do not take the initiative to ask their children to come back to take care of them, considering themselves as “burden”; they even refuse to go to the nursing home for they do not want to “waste money earned by their kids’ laborious work; they even do not mention anything about parent-child communication, pension and social communication.

The empty nesters are struggling with dilemma between their determination to be strong and independent parents without companion of their children and their wish to live with their kids and share every cherished moment together. Accompanied by solitude, they even are not aware of depression and other psychological diseases.

# THE PHENOMENON WE HAVE SEEN

There are many things in life that remind us of the misfortune of the empty nesters.

In a village called Nizhuang, most of the people living in the village are old people. Because most young people leave the village and try hard to make their ends meet in the city, the olds, the rest of the residents in this village, become empty nesters. Mr.Lin was an 81- year-old old man who originally planned to spend rest of his life with his wife peacefully, but, a few years ago, his wife died of stomach cancer.

Before his wife's death, Mr.Lin was optimistic and energetic: he and his wife went to the neighbors to chat.However, now, he changed a lot: his smiles disappeared on his face; he hardly interacted with his neighbors; his emotion becomes increasingly unstable...

Yet, what his two sons, who hardly visit their father, did were merely "sending some daily necessities" and then leaving Mr.Lin in the villages alone.With accumulating loneliness, in July last year, Mr.Lin passed away.

When he was dead, his home was messy and he was so thin and pale like a piece of paper...When his two sons attended his funeral, they finally knew that they would not have another chance to hug their father any longer.

In addition to the live example, we get firsthand data from frontline medical workers and find that Chinese scholars and experts are gradually working on their research about medical work in depth.

And yet, the data they concluded from their studies is mostly at theoretical level; there are FEW practical studies. Even though the field of medical technology has also begun to expand, the clinic practice for empty nesters is in great deficiency; although there are also studies on the medical practice of the elderly, NO clear distinction between the characteristics of empty nesters and non-empty nesters has been made in China. The demand for the two is obviously different. Empty nesters have more needs for spiritual comfort. Although there are many studies on the involvement of empty nesters in social work, there are more of them floating in material and there is no deep research on the field of loneliness. In the study of loneliness, there are very few empty nesters as research objects.

Therefore, both the medical staff we interviewed and us, we hope to have more far-reaching research in one of the loneliness of empty nesters.

There are still many that we have not yet learned, so we should always do something for these old people.

## **WHAT CAN WE CHANGE ?**

In recent years, with the continuous development of the economy and the acceleration of the aging population, the number of empty nesters in China has increased.

According to the data of *China Family Development Report in 2015*, the number of empty nesters in China has reached half of the total number of elderly people. The problem of old-age care for empty nesters has become a social problem that cannot be ignored. Compared with the material needs, the empty nesters have greater needs in spiritual comfort.

Due to lack of children's companionship and reduction of social activities for the old, the empty nesters are apart from the daily communication with their surroundings. Thus, the loneliness, depression, or other negative feelings become dominant in their minds.

As a result, the negativity will be fermented and cause the empty nesters to feel depressed, think that the society will abandon themselves, and they might consider an alternative way—suiciding—to end their suffering life. Loneliness affects all aspects of the empty nest and old life invisibly. Among them, when the empty nest elderly are hospitalized, the problem of loneliness is more obvious. The disease is entangled in body and mind, and the child is unable to take care of the bed for various reasons. This makes the elderly feel more lonely during the hospital stay, and the mood is unstable, and they are unwilling to take the initiative to cooperate with the medical staff.

Thankfully, the government as well as charitable organizations have adopted traditional means such as public service advertisements and nursing homes to send warmth.

Indeed, we cannot deny some positive results generated by the enforcement of these fashions, but what we have to admit is that these methods are not effective as people assume for it merely resolves small part of the problem we are facing.

What can we do to ease this problem MORE effectively?

What can the whole society do more to save these “trapped birds” MORE effectively?

To push the solution process forward further , we proposes some strategies shown in the following paragraphs:

## **I). Material support**

As the technology develops, the power of technology can be likely to make an outstanding contribution to this issue. Turning traditional pensions into tech-based pensions could be one of the solutions. A series of high-tech products such as TV boxes designed only for the empty nesters to improve the quality of life and to solve the problem of loneliness of the empty nesters to the greatest extent. It is a brilliant entertainment ——the information-based , Chinese-style “pensions” ——for the elderly, the trapped birds.

### **i). Remote monitoring of elderly life**

Using the Internet of Things technology, the family is informed by various sensors to make the daily life of the elderly remotely monitored.

For example, when the old man falls down at home, the safety sensor on the ground will immediately notify the medical staff and the relatives of the elderly , as agreed in the previous agreement; while the food is left unattended for a long time, the sensor installed in the kitchen will alarm to remind forgetful old people.

But what if the old man has already gone out? Will there be a poetical threat? “It doesn't matter...”says the manager, “If the alarm is still unresponsive for a while, then the gas will automatically shut down.”

In addition to these emergencies, another dramatic part of the care of the Internet of Wisdom “Smart Wisdom” is its meticulous service. For instance, if the faucet in an old man’s residence has not been opened for 24 hours, the alarm system will remind his kid(s) through phone or SMS to see either the old man just goes out or he encounters some accidents.

Mr. Wang and other doctors or nurses we interviewed recommended this product as well, “...[this remote monitoring product] is useful and helpful for hospitals for the empty-nest patients can be sent by their kids to hospitals in time for kids can be alerted by the alarm of the system...”

## **ii). The invisible “partner”**

"Smart and old-age care" can not only protect the safety of the elderly at all times, but also monitor the health of the elderly comprehensively.

Take the wrist sphygmomanometer and the watch-type GPS locator as examples . With the help from them , people can monitor the physical condition of the elderly anytime and anywhere like a portable “medicine scorpion”. At the same time, people can also track of the old , accompanying with their parents as “invisible companions”.

According to product launch of the company, if the elderly want to relax, the system will recommend the elderly about the day's TV programs, community activities and other content. After the installation of an entertainment sensor on the door, the owner's favorite music will be automatically played and the indoor



heating and lighting will be adjusted in time as the old enter the door.

## **I). Spiritual support:**

### **i). THE ROLE OF FAMILY PENSION.**

At present, family pension is still the main way for the elderly in China to support the elderly which requires the joint efforts of family members such as spouses and children.

In the empty-nest family, children are not around and mutual care, tolerance as well as understanding between spouses are crucial. Taking care of each other in life and giving the empty nesters spiritual comfort can ensure that they have a happy life in their later years. The long-lasting lonely life among the empty nest will cause a sense of loss, inferiority and loneliness, and depression is difficult to resolve.

At this time, if someone and the elderly are "squatting" for a while, the mental state of the elderly can be greatly improved. Respecting the old and loving the young is the traditional virtue of Chinese. Children, as hope of family and as parents' emotional sustenance, should accompany with their parents as much as possible.

As the saying goes, "the trees are afraid of hollowness, and people are afraid of being deserted." When parents retired at home, they hope that their children will stay with them and visit

them frequently .Children should be aware of their psychological activities, be active and caring about their lives, and pursue an active lifestyle. Whether it is coming back home to visit parents or call greetings, they should not be only “words but not deeds”. What they should do is truly pay attention to the communication with the elderly, help the elderly to solve problems, and make the elderly get emotional care and spiritual comfort.

## **ii). “MENTAL SUPPORT OF EMPTY NESTERS” IN CURRENT LAW SYSTEM.**

Expect those possible solutions about the physical or spiritual support , the more comprehensive law always is considered as another potential fashion as well.

Though the legislation part is the most powerful one to cope with the challenge we are facing, it is the hardest to change simultaneously.

The newly revised Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly stipulates that family members should care about the spiritual needs of the elderly and must not ignore or neglect the elderly. Family members living separately from the elderly should often visit or greet the elderly.

Also, the law stipulates that the employer shall guarantee the right of dependents to visit relatives in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State.

It can be seen that the legal system for mental support is gradually developed. And the law itself will be a key step in solving the problem of mental health support for the empty

nesters in China for it not only reminds and urges children to pay attention to the living space and spiritual world of the elderly, but encourages relevant departments of society.

Actively responding, and committed to providing careful consideration and support for the “good filial piety” of citizens. But this is only a good start. We still need to constantly improve the legal system for the self-support of the empty nesters and strengthen the system.

### **iii). FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Increase investment, integrate social resources, improve community old-age service organizations and regularly organize various activities. The government provides the empty nesters with suitable residential environment for fitness and recreation.

According to the physical and mental characteristics of the empty nest elderly, design an activity venue suitable for empty nesters. Such as the establishment of badminton clubs, senior universities, chess and card rooms. Each city can set up urban community services for empty nesters, and guide empty nesters to actively participate in community activities to achieve the sustainable development of empty nesters participating in community activities.

Our government or other institutions should encourage enterprises, institutions, social organizations and individuals to invest in the construction of community aged service facilities in various forms, establish standardized community service facilities for the elderly, and promote the professionalization and professionalization of community workers.

# **OUR EXPECTATION FOR FUTURE PENSION**

ALL of us believe that this serious social problem is difficult to eradicate, but what we hope to do is to ease this problem as much as possible. While paying more attention on these “loner birds”, people can also prevent more old people from

becoming the next empty nesters and suffering from difficulties;rather, pay more attention on them Consequently, more old people can avoid the pain from depression and loneliness .