

Empty nest syndrome is a myth claim scientists

Parents of children who stay at home are more likely to suffer depression than those whose offspring move out, claim scientists in a study that seems to debunk "empty nest syndrome".

Researchers said that far from feeling abandoned and lonely, adults with their children living far away seemed happier and more content than those with sons and daughters still living at home or in the local community.

They said that the parents of children who had fled the nest were often from more educated and affluent backgrounds and were proud of their offspring's achievements.

Adults with "stay at home kids" on the other hand were associated with failed aspiration and inter family conflicts, it was discovered.

Dr Melanie Abas, a psychiatrist at King's College London and lead researcher, said the team was surprised at the findings. "A commonly held view is that out-migration of young people has starkly negative consequences for parents living in rural areas as they get older," she said.

"But our findings challenge the popular belief that family separation causes older parents to feel abandoned and lacking in support."

The study was carried out in villages in rural Thailand, and questioned more than 1,000 parents aged 60 and over.

It found depression was less common among parents whose



children lived further away, compared to parents whose children lived locally.

Depression was highest among parents of poorer families with all their children still living in the local area, the study showed.

Dr Abas suggested parents whose children left home tended to be better educated. They were also more likely to be younger, married and still working.

She said each of these factors reduced the risk of depression.

In contrast, having fewer children migrate could be linked to failed aspirations, increasing the risk of family conflict and depression, researchers said.

Many parents in Thailand rely on their offspring for money – and children who leave home are more likely to be able to send money to support their family, reducing the risk of the depression, the study found.

While the research was carried out in Thailand, the findings are thought to be universal, particularly where children leave a rural home and move to the city.

Dr Abas said: "While there are obvious differences between Britain and Thailand there are also similarities. In both countries the families are aspirational for their children and in both countries the children leave villages to move to the cities.

"What is surprising is that when all the children move out, you would think the parents would feel desperate but they seem to be holding up very well."

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Inside



3 Identity of Beethoven's Für Elise revealed by music expert



penguins at the Central Park Zoo in Manhattan are inseparable.

They entwine their necks, vocalize to each other, they have sex. Last survivor of 'unsinkable' Titanic dies at 97 05.31.09. When offered female companionship, they have adamantly refused. The females aren't interested in them, either.

At one time, the two were so desperate to incubate an egg together that they put a rock in their nest and sat on it, keeping it warm with

As I learn more about the beings of this planet, I realize there is no difference between the human and the insect. The only difference is perhaps our destructiveness. Here is another example of our similarity. While countries waste time on making laws on ridiculous issues like abortion and homosexuality, the rest of the animal world takes these issues as natural.

University of Oslo's Natural History Museum in Norway has put up a first-ever museum display "Against Nature?", which presents 51 species of animals exhibiting homosexuality. Homosexuality is defined as sex



Animals, too, could be happy and gay

between two or more members of the same sex in the same species.

Dragonflies, spiders, crabs, shellfish, gutworms, bats, whales and dolphins far from being unnatural, homosexuality is a normal part of the animal world. "Homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" are terms defined by human societies. These boundaries are invisible in the animal kingdom. Homosexual and bisexual animals, range from mountain gorillas to cats, dogs and guinea pigs. The animal kingdom rejoices in all kinds of lifestyles.

Studies of animal homosexuality are centuries old. In 1896, French entomologist Henri Gadeau de Kerville published a drawing of two male scarab beetles copulating. In the early 1900s, investigators described homosexual behavior in baboons, salmon, garter snakes and gentoo penguins. In 1914 Gilbert Hamilton reported in the Journal of Animal Behavior that same-sex behavior in Japanese macaques and baboons occurred largely as a way of making peace with would-be foes. He wrote "homosexual alliances between mature and immature males insure the assistance of an adult defender in the event of an attack.

"How similar to the "insurance" bonding of humans in jail! In 1999 Bruce Bagemihl, a biologist at the University of Wisconsin, published a book Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity. Bagemihl found that homosexuality had been documented in 1,500 species. The earliest mention of animal homosexuality probably came 2,300 years ago when Aristotle described two female hyenas cavorting with each other.

Not only does homosexual behavior exist in nearly every species (as demonstrated by thousands of studies beginning with Konrad Lorenz, the father of modern zoology) but as one goes up the evolutionary ladder from insects to humans, homosexual activity increases in frequency.

Roy and Silo, two male chinstrap

their abdomens. Finally, the keeper gave them a fertile egg to hatch. A chick, Tango, was born. They raised Tango, keeping her warm and feeding her until she could go out into the world on her own.

A pair of gay vultures at the Jerusalem Zoo have shown the world just how caring gay adoptive parents can be. Israeli zoologist Shmuel Yidov slipped a day-old vulture chick into their nest.

The two fathers reared the baby. They shaded him, brought him water from a pond, fed him, stopped him falling from the nest.

Biology professor Joan Roughgarden at Stanford University, in her book "Evolution's Rainbow" says, mating isn't only about multiplying. Like humans, animals have sex just for fun or love or to cement their social bonds.

Some female grizzly bears form partnerships, travel together, defend each other, raise cubs together and putting off hibernation in an attempt to stay together longer.

Scientists have found homosexual behavior throughout the animal world. Same sex pairs of animals kiss and caress each other with obvious tenderness. Male pairs and female pairs form long-lasting pair-bonds and even fight off potential opposite sex partners when they appear. Members of the pair show distress at being separated from their partners and joy when reunited.

Even when they lose their same sex partner, white-fronted Amazon parrots will not revert.

So will gay Long-eared hedgehogs, Stellar's sea eagles and barn owls.

Swans are the symbols of eternal romantic love. But one fifth of the couples are all male or all female. Male couples mate with a female just to have a baby. Once she lays the egg, they chase her away, hatch the egg, and raise a family on their own. Sometimes they steal the eggs and become model parents. Male flamingoes and other birds will have one-

night stands with females to produce eggs, then chase off the mother and rear the offspring with another male. 12% of roseate tern couples are female-female pairs who fertilize their eggs through a quick fling with males, and then remain faithful to each other for years. Five percent of geese and duck couples do the same. Single females will lay eggs in a homosexual pair's nest. In a colony of black-headed gulls, every tenth pair is lesbian.

15 percent of female western gulls are gay. They woo each other with gifts of food and form bonds that last for years. They build joint nests. Occasionally, one or both females will mate with males, but they always raise their young together.

Two percent of male ostriches ignore females and court males with a dance that involves running toward the chosen partner, skidding to a stop in front of him, pirouetting, crouching, rocking, fluffing feathers, puffing their throats and twisting their necks like a corkscrew. Male giraffes spend most of their time in bachelor groups, where they entwine necks and rub against each other for hours at a time.

These "necking" sessions often culminate in mounting. Homosexuality is common among young male dolphin calves. According to researchers, since male-male cooperation is extremely important for adult survival, the homosexual behavior of the young calves could be aimed at establishing lifelong bonds.

Male walruses, often form homosexual pair bonds and have sex with each other outside of the breeding season, but will revert to a heterosexual pattern during the normal breeding season.

Male big horn sheep live in "homosexual societies." If a male sheep chooses to not have gay sex, he becomes a social outcast! The male and female bighorn sheep unite during the rutting season, but the rest of the year the males stick together.

The more social the species, the more likely it is to engage in homosexual activity, the exhibition argues. "Many social animals have complex social

systems where individuals seek out allies for help and protection. Sex is an important way of strengthening the alliance."

In fact, advanced animal communities, which require communal bonds in order to function are more likely to have homosexuality intermixed with heterosexuality. Japanese Macaque society revolves around females, who dominate the group. Males come and go. To help maintain the necessary social networks, female

macaques are lesbian. These friendly copulations, form the bedrock of macaque society, preventing unnecessary violence and aggression. In fact females will choose to mate with another female, as opposed to a male, 92.5% of the time.

Bonobos, dwarf chimpanzees, engage in sexual behavior to ease social tensions and avoid conflict.

For instance, if two bonobos approach a box thrown into their enclosure, they will mount each other before playing with the box.

Such situations lead to squabbles in most other species. But bonobos use sex to diffuse tension.

In Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape, primatologist Frans de Waal writes that he has observed hundreds of such incidents, suggesting that these homosexual acts may be a general peacekeeping strategy.

"The more homosexuality, the more peaceful the species," asserts Petter Bäckman of the University of Oslo's Museum of Natural History. Other animals mount animals of the same sex but their motivation may differ. Dogs usually do so to express dominance. Domesticated cattle mount each other as stress relieving behaviour. Male lions often band together with their brothers to lead the pride. To ensure loyalty, they strengthen the bonds by having sex with each other.

A statement in the exhibition says, "One thing is clear — homosexuality is found throughout the animal kingdom, it is not against nature."

To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in

