

# Sandwich generation vs empty nesters: 71% fear loneliness, only a third trust their savings to last, says report

India's changing family structures and rising life expectancy are exposing sharp gaps in retirement readiness among the Sandwich Generation and Empty Nesters. New data from Axis Max Life's India Retirement Index Study shows that fewer than four in ten in either group expect their retirement savings to last beyond a decade, highlighting deep financial and emotional vulnerabilities.



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*As per the report, only 33% of Empty Nesters and 38% of the Sandwich Generation believe their retirement savings will last beyond 10 years.*

**Retirement savings:** As India's family structures evolve and life expectancy rises, new fault lines are emerging in how Indians prepare for life after work. Findings from Axis Max Life Insurance's India Retirement Index Study (IRIS) 5.0 point to significant gaps in retirement readiness among two influential demographic cohorts: the Sandwich Generation and Empty Nesters. Despite growing awareness, both groups face financial, health and emotional vulnerabilities that could shape the country's retirement landscape in the coming decades.

Conducted in partnership with Kantar, the study places India's overall Retirement Index score at a modest 48, underlining persistent challenges in long-term security. Only 33% of Empty Nesters and 38% of the Sandwich Generation believe their retirement savings will last beyond 10 years, a concern magnified by longer lifespans, rising healthcare costs and weakening traditional support systems.

### **Sandwich Generation**

The Sandwich Generation, middle-aged individuals supporting ageing parents while still financing their children's education and early careers, reflects the strain of multi-generational responsibility. While this cohort scores slightly higher on the Retirement Index at 49, their preparedness is shaped by constant trade-offs. About 67% have started saving for retirement, often prompted by family advice or a growing awareness of life's unpredictability. Life insurance penetration is relatively high at 78%, indicating a strong focus on protection.

Yet reliance on traditional safety nets remains evident. Among those yet to invest meaningfully for retirement, 40% expect their children to support them, while 37% count on inherited wealth. Emotionally, this group faces what the study terms a "dependency paradox": even as 55% feel secure about future family support, 76% worry about becoming financially dependent on their children, and 71% admit to fearing loneliness in retirement.

### **Empty Nesters**

Empty Nesters, parents whose children have moved out, present a contrasting but equally complex picture. Often closer to retirement, they show higher financial awareness and discipline, albeit driven by hindsight. Around 71% have already begun investing for retirement, and 86% say they know the exact corpus required to sustain their post-retirement lifestyle. While traditional instruments like fixed and recurring deposits remain popular, nearly 44% now invest in mutual funds or SIPs, well above the national average.

However, confidence fades when longevity is factored in. Only one in three Empty Nesters expects their retirement corpus to last more than a decade. Health-related anxieties are also prominent. Although health insurance coverage and medical check-ups are broadly in line with national averages, only 72% believe they will remain fit during retirement—significantly below the all-India benchmark. Three in four Empty Nesters fear loneliness in their later years, highlighting the emotional cost of living independently in a more nuclear, urbanised society.

## Sandwich Generation vs Empty Nesters: IRIS 5.0 Uncovers India's Retirement Savings Gaps

As changing family structures and rise longevity shift India's retirement planning norms, significant savings gaps leave **Sandwich Generation** (aged 40–55, raise at rate) and **Empty Nesters** (on for both aging parents) and Empty Nesters (live independently after children move out) vulnerable.

### Sandwich Generation



**38%** of Sandwich Gen say their retirement corpus will last **10+ years**

**40%** expect children to care of them in retirement

**71%** fear loneliness during old age

### Empty Nesters



Only **33%** of Empty Nesters say their retirement corpus will last **10+ years**

**18%** deferred retirement planning

**75%** fear loneliness during old age

### Key Concerns

**67%** Sandwich Gen, **71%** Empty Nesters worry savings won't last a decade post-retirement

**76%** Sandwich Gen, **73%** Empty Nesters fear burdening kids financially

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Axis Max Life's India Retirement Index Study 5.0, January 2026

retirement savings in India, retirement planning India, Sandwich Generation retirement savings, Empty Nesters retirement savings, Empty Nesters retirement savings, Empty Nesters savings

Axis Max Life Managing Director and CEO Sumit Madan said the findings reflect two interconnected realities of India's demographic transition. "While the Sandwich Generation is balancing immediate multi-generational responsibilities, Empty Nesters are planning for a future defined by independence and self-reliance. Retirement planning must move beyond accumulation to address longevity, dignity and emotional security," he said.

The IRIS study underscores that improving retirement outcomes will require more than higher savings rates. Emotional well-being, healthcare preparedness and realistic longevity planning are emerging as equally critical pillars. As India moves away from joint families and informal support systems, the study suggests that both cohorts must recalibrate expectations—shifting from dependence on family to structured, long-term planning. **BT**