

Marital Silence as a Reflection of Family Power Imbalances: A Sociological Study of Wives' Attitudes in the City of Souk Ahras.

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the phenomenon of marital silence across its communicative, affective, and interactive dimensions among married women in the city of Souk Ahras. The primary objective is to investigate whether this relational withdrawal functions as a reflection of domestic power imbalances. Methodologically, the research adopted a descriptive approach, utilizing a standardized questionnaire administered to a targeted sample of sixty wives. The statistical results confirmed a moderate, yet significant, level of marital silence. The interactive dimension recorded the highest prevalence, primarily utilized as a mechanism for conflict evasion. Furthermore, the findings indicated no significant differences attributed to age or educational level. Conversely, a wife's financial superiority significantly heightened the severity of marital silence. Ultimately, the study concludes that marital silence acts as a passive-aggressive structural strategy reflecting disrupted power dynamics, rather than a mere communication deficit.

Keywords: Marital Silence; Communicative Withdrawal; Power Imbalance; Domestic Alienation; Spousal Interaction.

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I- Introduction :

The family functions as the foundational building block of society, acting as the primary institution responsible for the socialization and psychological equilibrium of its members. The stability and continuity of this institution rely profoundly on the robustness of the marital relationship, which is fundamentally rooted in effective communication, emotional exchange, and interactive participation in managing daily affairs. Dialogue between spouses transcends being a mere functional tool for exchanging logistical information; it serves as a vital generative mechanism for constructing shared meanings, resolving conflicts, and reinforcing the bonds of intimacy and affection. Within a healthy communicative environment, partners can successfully absorb external stressors and restore internal stability, thereby securing the cohesion of the family unit against rapidly evolving societal challenges.

However, amidst contemporary socio-economic complexities and shifting cultural paradigms, numerous family systems are experiencing a sharp decline in communicative competence. This decline has catalyzed the emergence of a highly complex relational pathology known as "marital silence." In modern sociological and psychological frameworks, this concept is no longer interpreted as a fleeting absence of words or a mere physiological response to occupational exhaustion. Instead, it has crystallized into an active, multidimensional behavioral strategy. It represents a deliberate withdrawal and communicative isolation that strips the domestic sphere of its human essence, plunging partners into a state of "domestic alienation." The severity of this phenomenon is magnified when analyzed through the lens of power imbalances and structural shifts in gender roles. In specific cultural contexts, such as the Algerian domestic sphere, married women frequently bear the brunt of this communicative rupture. Confronted with a partner's tactical withdrawal, a woman either endures the silence as a punitive, marginalizing authority or is forced to adopt a protective silence to avert direct clashes and maintain a minimal threshold of familial stability, ultimately pushing her into profound emotional isolation.

The phenomenon of communicative withdrawal has garnered considerable attention, with various previous studies attempting to approach it from different methodological and thematic angles. For instance, Mohammed (2021) aimed to explore the correlation between the excessive use of social media platforms and the spread of marital dumbness. Relying on a descriptive method and utilizing a questionnaire administered to a sample of 400 respondents in Sohag, Egypt, the study concluded that technology significantly intensifies both communicative and affective silence. While Mohammed's work aligns with the current research by highlighting the communicative dimensions of the phenomenon, it diverges significantly in its causal interpretation and primary variables. Mohammed adopted a linear approach positioning technology as the primary independent variable, whereas our research strives to delve into structural dynamics and domestic power imbalances.

In a comparable local context, Ben Lghou, Boukhelkhal, and Touhami (2024) investigated the role of partner selection criteria as an independent variable affecting marital adjustment (the dependent variable). Utilizing a descriptive analytical method with a questionnaire on a sample of 120 married women in Laghouat, Algeria, their findings indicated that the absence of initial compatibility breeds interactive withdrawal as a conflict-avoidance mechanism. The current study shares the similarity of exclusively targeting a female sample to understand women's subjective lived experiences within an Algerian demographic. Methodologically, however, our study differs by treating "marital silence" itself as the primary construct with strictly measured dimensions, rather than viewing it merely as an implicit consequence of pre-marital choices relying on retrospective memory bias.

Furthermore, Dlamini and Okonkwo (2024) explored social withdrawal and depressive symptoms as outcomes of prolonged marital power imbalance. Employing a clinical psychological approach and diagnostic interviews on a sample of 180 individuals in psychological clinics, the researchers concluded that there is a strong correlation between feelings of powerlessness and the resort to silence. While our study aligns theoretically with this sociological argument regarding the

balance of power, it differs fundamentally in sample characteristics and methodological tools. We opted to investigate the phenomenon using a standardized Likert-scale questionnaire within a natural, non-clinical community setting to avoid generalizing the pathological traits of already-fractured clinical samples to the broader family context.

From this review, it becomes evident that while previous studies are rich in scope, they tend to concentrate either on overt technological causes or clinical extremities, leaving a critical gap in understanding the multidimensional nature of marital silence as a structural power dynamic in natural settings. Based on the foregoing rationale, the research problem of the current study revolves precisely around the following single, targeted question: What is the attitude of married women in the city of Souk Ahras toward the dimensions of marital silence (communicative, affective, and interactive)?

To address this central question, the study posits the following primary non-directional hypothesis: There is a statistically significant difference between the average attitude of married women in the city of Souk Ahras toward marital silence and the hypothetical mean of the measurement scale. Branching from this central premise are three sub-hypotheses seeking to verify this difference across specific components:

- There is a statistically significant difference between the female sample's average attitude toward communicative marital silence and the hypothetical mean of the scale.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the female sample's average attitude toward affective marital silence and the hypothetical mean of the scale.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the female sample's average attitude toward interactive marital silence and the hypothetical mean of the scale.

1. Concepts

Marital silence, particularly concerning the psychological and emotional realities of women within the marital dyad, represents a highly complex communicative phenomenon rather than a simple void of speech. Historically perceived as a passive absence, contemporary academic literature increasingly conceptualizes marital silence as an active, multifaceted behavioral strategy deeply embedded within relational power dynamics. To fully grasp this phenomenon, it is essential to trace its historical trajectory before critically deconstructing its modern theoretical manifestations.

1.1 The Historical Evolution of the Concept

The scholarly understanding of marital silence has undergone a radical transformation, evolving through four distinct conceptual paradigms. Early research strictly framed silence through a traditional lens as a primitive defense mechanism. Scholars focused on silence as a tool utilized to evade direct conflict, heavily stigmatizing it as a passive-aggressive behavior that actively hindered conflict resolution (Christensen & Heavey, 1990, p. 73). Relational psychology later advanced this concept by contextualizing silence within a vicious interactional cycle known as the "demand/withdraw" pattern. Studies revealed that silence is rarely an isolated event; rather, it is a predictable response triggered by a partner's relentless pressure or criticism, serving as a strong predictor of declining marital satisfaction (Schrodt & Shimkowski, 2014, p. 28).

As the field progressed, researchers shifted focus toward perception and communicative competence. Recent investigations suggest that when a spouse utilizes silence, the other partner appraises them as lacking communication skills, an assumption that deeply exacerbates the emotional divide (LaFreniere, 2020, p. 161). Most recently, in contemporary sociological

contexts—particularly within Arab and Algerian literature—the concept has morphed into "marital dumbness." Driven by the omnipresence of technology, spouses engage in selective silence, substituting genuine verbal dialogue with digital isolation, fundamentally chilling human connection within the shared domestic space (Mohammed, 2020, p. 335).

1.2 Defining the Dimensions of Marital Silence: A Critical Synthesis

Building upon this historical foundation, the definitions of marital silence can be categorized into several distinct psychological dimensions, each requiring critical examination to understand its impact on women.

At its most foundational level, marital silence is frequently defined as the complete absence of conversational language, resulting in profound emotional detachment even when spouses share a physical residence. This state is often categorized as a psychological, non-biological functional failure of communication, entirely divorced from cognitive or speech deficits (Mohammed, 2021, p. 74). While this conceptualization provides a baseline, it remains somewhat reductionist. By defining a woman's silence strictly through "absence" or "failure," this perspective risks stripping the behavior of its intentionality, treating it merely as a systemic breakdown rather than acknowledging that the refusal to speak can be an active, deeply communicative relational stance.

Building upon this, systemic theories conceptualize marital silence as an emotional or physical retreat utilized to lower systemic tension. It manifests as "domestic alienation," where spouses exist as strangers under the same roof, deliberately avoiding interaction to manage anxiety (Mohammed, 2021, pp. 74, 81). However, while a systemic lens is effective for understanding anxiety regulation, it largely lacks a critical gender perspective. It frequently fails to address how entrenched patriarchal structures and power imbalances might necessitate this emotional distancing as a wife's only viable strategy for navigating an unequal domestic sphere without escalating into emotional or physical danger.

In more adversarial frameworks, marital silence is defined as a specialized form of passive negativity or the "silent treatment." Here, it operates as a punitive strategy characterized by disdain, rejection, or deliberate emotional neglect achieved through the strict withholding of verbal exchange (Mohammed, 2021, pp. 73-74). Yet, categorizing silence predominantly as a form of emotional abuse or passive-aggressive hostility can be academically problematic when applied universally. While undeniably punitive in certain contexts, this framework risks pathologizing a behavior that, for many disempowered women, might actually function as a desperate, non-violent form of resistance against overwhelming coercion.

This resistance is often contextualized within the "demand/withdraw" interactive pattern, where one partner pursues or criticizes, while the other systematically resorts to silence, withdrawing emotionally or physically, and outright refusing to discuss the pressing issue (Li & Johnson, 2016, p. 64). Despite remaining one of the most empirically robust frameworks in relational psychology, its primary limitation lies in its inherent circularity. By assigning equal interactional weight to both the "demander" and the "withdrawer," this model sometimes obscures the original catalyst of the conflict, potentially blaming a woman's reactive silence rather than scrutinizing the initial provocation that triggered it.

Further expanding on withdrawal, a cluster of definitions portrays silence as a manifestation of conflict avoidance, unassertiveness, and denial. It is characterized by suppressing emotions, dodging direct confrontation, and closing the doors to dialogue to escape constant criticism, paired with a mutual, illusory hope that conflicts will organically resolve themselves (Butt & Farooq, 2025, p. 29; Halloush, 2020, p. 93; Jiang, 2022, p. 2; Ragul & Thenmozhi, 2023, p. 71). Labeling this approach strictly as "unassertive" or as a form of maladaptive "denial," however, reveals a normative, often Western-centric bias that inherently privileges overt verbal expression. In many high-context or conservative cultures, a woman's mutual avoidance is not necessarily a psychological failing, but rather a culturally sanctioned, pragmatic method of preserving family cohesion and social face.

Ultimately, contemporary literature arrives at the concept of "protective silence," defined as a deliberate, calculated choice to conceal feelings of distress. A wife may utilize this strategy to protect her own psychological well-being, shield her children from the devastating fallout of chronic marital conflict, and maintain a facade of familial stability, despite the intense isolation it produces (Dlamini & Okonkwo, 2024, pp. 4, 7). This is arguably the most empathetic and contextually robust definition in the current literature, as it successfully captures the paradoxical reality of the female experience in fractured marriages: silence operates simultaneously as a resilient, protective shield ensuring daily survival for the family unit, and an isolating prison that guarantees the woman's long-term emotional deprivation.

Drawing upon this critical synthesis, the current study operationally defines marital silence as a deliberate, multidimensional behavioral strategy of withdrawal. It is empirically measured through three interconnected dimensions: communicative silence, characterized by the cessation of routine verbal dialogue and the tactical evasion of daily conversation; affective silence, manifested in the deliberate withholding of emotional expression, warmth, and personal feelings; and interactive silence, defined by a conscious refusal to engage in joint decision-making, consultation, or collaborative conflict resolution within the domestic sphere.

2. The Multidimensional Construct of Marital Silence: A Critical Analysis

Marital silence operates not merely as a passive absence of speech, but as a complex, highly active phenomenon embedded within the structural fabric of a relationship. To comprehensively understand this dynamic, contemporary literature deconstructs marital silence into three interconnected psychological and relational dimensions: the communicative, the affective (emotional), and the interactive. Analyzing these dimensions requires moving beyond superficial definitions to critically evaluate the systemic and individual impacts of this phenomenon.

2.1 The Communicative Dimension

At its foundational level, marital silence represents a severe rupture in the communicative axis of a dyad. Effective marital communication serves as the primary pillar for fortifying relational bonds, wherein mutual dialogue acts as a mechanism to resolve domestic disputes and prevent their escalation (Halloush, 2020, p. 80). However, framing communication purely as a utilitarian dispute-resolution tool often overlooks its generative capacity; dialogue does not merely fix existing problems, but actively constructs the shared relational reality. Conversely, the total absence of this dialogue and the reliance on passive silence breed "marital dumbness," establishing a profound state of emotional divorce despite physical cohabitation (Mohammed, 2021, p. 77). Defining silence solely as a communicative deficit, however, risks ignoring instances where the refusal to speak is actually utilized as a deliberate, albeit maladaptive, signal of boundary-setting in highly coercive environments.

The nuances of these communication patterns dictate overall marital stability, with constructive exchanges strongly correlating with reduced relational instability (Butt & Farooq, 2025, p. 22). Marital distress emerges sharply when these mechanisms fail, particularly in couples lacking the verbal agility required for joint problem-solving (Amroun & Belmihoub, 2025, p. 131). In conflictual climates, the "demand/withdraw" communication pattern acts as a primary barrier to resolution, significantly widening the communicative gap (Knight & Alberts, 2018, p. 110). While empirically robust, this conceptualization sometimes inadvertently pathologizes the withdrawing

partner without sufficiently analyzing the demanding partner's potential use of aggressive or intrusive tactics. Ultimately, true communication transcends the mere exchange of logistical data; it necessitates an affective transmission of feelings that mitigates partner resentment and elevates relational satisfaction (Hafeez, Loona, & Nawaz, 2025, p. 135). Achieving this requires aligning spousal standards to facilitate a shared communicative language, precluding collisions rooted in mismatched expectations (Ben Lghou, Boukhelkhal, & Touhami, 2024, p. 152). Yet, one must critically consider that rigidly standardizing expectations might suppress individual autonomy, suggesting that healthy communication should perhaps tolerate, rather than erase, fundamental interpersonal differences.

2.2 The Affective and Emotional Dimension

Beyond the exchange of words, marital silence deeply permeates the emotional infrastructure of the relationship. Marital dumbness fundamentally correlates with domestic alienation and emotional frigidity, frequently manifesting as a form of emotional abuse characterized by rejection and disdain, maintained through deliberate verbal withholding (Mohammed, 2021, p. 79). Categorizing silence universally as an abusive tactic can be reductive, as for profoundly disempowered partners, it may serve as an internalized trauma response rather than a calculated, malicious strategy. When prolonged power imbalances characterize the marriage, the subjugated partner is often forced into social withdrawal, triggering deep depressive symptoms that severely erode their psychological stability (Dlamini & Okonkwo, 2024, p. 1).

The persistence of the demand/withdraw cycle further induces "emotional flooding," a precarious state wherein a partner experiences severe psychological exhaustion and acute internal pressure (Biesen et al., 2023, p. 869). Consequently, marital depression operates as a highly interactive phenomenon: one partner's withdrawal inherently generates feelings of affective rejection in the other, deepening the chasm of dissatisfaction (Li & Johnson, 2016, p. 64). This underscores a systemic paradox where the very attempt to self-soothe through withdrawal directly triggers the partner's abandonment anxieties. Mitigating this distress requires emotional acceptance and the deliberate reduction of cognitive distortions to rebuild foundational affection (Amroun & Belmihoub, 2025, p. 151). Failing to achieve this emotional attunement subjects both spouses to a chronic deprivation of basic psychological needs, paving the road to affective numbness (Halloush, 2020, p. 95). This mutual withdrawal not only decimates emotional intimacy but also distorts the offspring's perception of parental communicative competence, threatening the broader family cohesion (LaFreniere, 2020, p. 164). In contemporary settings, the maladaptive use of social media exacerbates this emotional void, as partners seek psychological gratification outside the familial sphere, further entrenching domestic silence (Mohammed, 2021, p. 83). Blaming digital media, however, often masks deeper, pre-existing relational fractures that merely utilize technology as a convenient escape mechanism. Conversely, high emotional intelligence and the empathetic decoding of a partner's states foster marital happiness (Lafifi & Maarouf, 2022, p. 218). Nevertheless, expecting constant empathetic decoding places an immense emotional labor burden, often disproportionately shouldered by women, highlighting a gendered gap in current emotional intelligence literature.

2.3 The Interactive Dimension

The third dimension evaluates silence through the lens of behavioral interactivity. Marital silence manifests as a severely negative interactive pattern, serving as a critical indicator of relational apathy and the complete cessation of joint participation in shared life domains (Salhi & Sebti, 2023, p. 223). Healthy interactive adjustment is defined by a couple's capacity for cooperative behavior and the deliberate avoidance of actions that thwart a partner's goals (Lafifi & Maarouf, 2022, p. 218). Positive joint interactions during crises fortify relational resilience, whereas criticism and withdrawal rapidly deplete relational resources (Jiang, 2022, p. 10). This resource-depletion model is highly pragmatic but fails to account for macro-level structural stressors—such as economic hardship—that exhaust couples regardless of their interpersonal competence.

Offensive communication styles, steeped in chronic blame and criticism, breed an interactive environment of perpetual conflict that dismantles any capacity for mutual adaptation (Halloush, 2020, p. 93). Consequently, couples lacking interactive competence often resort to emotional distancing and evasion to bypass confrontation, effectively paralyzing the resolution of daily marital hurdles (Hafeez, Loona, & Nawaz, 2025, p. 135). Continuous interaction through shared roles and joint decision-making remains a primary metric for a couple's flexibility in overcoming shared crises (Lafifi & Maarouf, 2022, p. 219). However, cognitive distortions—such as intense personalization and blame-shifting—propel spouses into defensive, negative interactions that severely widen the gap of marital dumbness (Amroun & Belmihoub, 2025, p. 134). Focusing heavily on internal cognitive distortions sometimes risks psychologizing issues that are actually rooted in objective relational injustices. An interactive style dominated by hyper-rationality or cold logic, devoid of warmth and active participation, institutionalizes feelings of neglect and alienates the spouses (Halloush, 2020, p. 92). In contrast, interactive factors such as egalitarianism, spousal validation, and transparent decision-making protect the marriage from disintegration and establish robust relational harmony (Ben Lghou et al., 2024, p. 155). Ultimately, achieving true egalitarian interactivity requires dismantling deeply ingrained patriarchal norms within the domestic sphere, a structural challenge that transcends mere interpersonal skill-building.

II– Methods and Materials:

To accurately capture the multidimensional nature of marital silence and comprehend its complex underlying mechanisms, the current study adopted a descriptive methodological design. This approach effectively facilitates the observation, characteristic analysis, and deconstruction of the phenomenon's relational dynamics within its natural socio-cultural setting. To properly contextualize the empirical data and ensure the precision of the resultant findings, the research trajectory was confined within strict spatial, demographic, and temporal parameters. Geographically, the fieldwork was executed within the regional boundaries of the Souk Ahras municipality. Temporally, the data collection phase, encompassing the distribution of the questionnaires, was conducted between January and February 2025.

Demographically, the study population was exclusively restricted to married women. This deliberate limitation was implemented to ensure sample homogeneity and to direct the analytical focus strictly toward the female lived experience of the phenomenon. Given the highly sensitive and inherently private nature of domestic dynamics—which frequently precludes the viability of direct random sampling methods—the researchers employed a non-probability snowball sampling technique. This approach proved to be an effective mechanism for accessing the target demographic and establishing necessary trust, ultimately yielding a final analytical sample of 60 wives.

Regarding the data collection instrument, a standardized scientific questionnaire was meticulously designed and structurally divided into two primary axes. The first axis was dedicated to extracting the personal and socio-demographic background data of the respondents through 06 independent questions. The second axis was specifically engineered to measure the empirical reality of marital silence, comprising 15 standardized statements. To deepen the analytical scope, this second axis was deconstructed into three equal thematic dimensions, each containing five items:

- The first dimension monitored the manifestations of "communicative silence" and its disruptive impacts within the spousal dialogue circle.
- The second dimension explored the broader prevalence of "affective silence" and emotional withdrawal between the partners.
- The third dimension investigated "interactive silence," which is characterized by the absence of mutual understanding and joint consultation mechanisms within the family system.

To verify the psychometric efficiency and robustness of the measurement tool, reliability coefficients were calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. The statistical processing yielded highly reliable scientific consistency indicators across all dimensions. Specifically, the communicative silence dimension recorded a value of 0.703, the affective silence dimension achieved a reliability of 0.733, and the interactive silence dimension stabilized at 0.721. These statistical indicators confirm that the instrument possesses a high degree of internal consistency, thereby fully justifying its suitability for empirical application and the formulation of precise scientific conclusions.

The data analysis for this study relied on both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, specifically arithmetic means and standard deviations, were calculated to evaluate the respondents' attitudes toward the dimensions of marital silence. Furthermore, inferential statistics—namely the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)—were employed to examine the statistical significance of differences among various demographic groups regarding their attitudes toward marital silence. All questionnaire data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.

III- Results and discussion :

This section of the study seeks to review and analyze the collected field data to address the core research questions and test the hypotheses concerning the phenomenon of marital silence. Initially, the inferential statistical results will be presented, employing a One-Sample t-test to rigorously evaluate the study's hypotheses regarding the sample's overall attitudes. This will be complemented by descriptive statistics, using detailed tables that illustrate the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the respondents' attitudes across the three primary dimensions: communicative, affective, and interactive. Additionally, the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be detailed to evaluate the impact of demographic and socio-economic variables, specifically age, educational level, and income disparity. Following this quantitative presentation, the section will transition into an in-depth, critical sociological discussion. Here, the numerical data will be contextualized within established theoretical frameworks to deconstruct the underlying structural implications and latent power dynamics driving this relational withdrawal, ultimately offering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

1. Results:

This section seeks to review and analyze the collected field data to address the research questions and test hypotheses concerning marital silence across its communicative, affective, and interactive dimensions. To achieve this, a detailed presentation of the statistical findings is provided, beginning with significance tests (One-Sample t-test) to determine the sample's overall attitude. Furthermore, descriptive statistics are utilized to evaluate the levels of each dimension individually. Finally, the impact of socio-demographic and economic variables—namely age, educational level, and spousal income disparity—is systematically examined. These numerical outputs are subsequently paired with an in-depth sociological reading to deconstruct the latent power dynamics driving this withdrawal behavior.

1.1 Testing hypotheses

The table presents the results of a One-Sample t-test, conducted to examine the significance of the differences between the sample's responses and the hypothetical mean of the 5-point Likert scale (which is 3). The findings indicate that the calculated t-values are remarkably high (Interactive: 21.53, Communicative: 21.23, Affective: 20.12) at 59 degrees of freedom. Given that the significance level (Sig.) for all dimensions is 0.000—substantially lower than the standard 0.05 threshold—the differences are statistically significant. By triangulating these results with the arithmetic means, which hovered slightly below the neutral midpoint (Interactive: 2.76, Communicative: 2.68, Affective: 2.49), this test statistically confirms that the study sample adopts a "moderate" yet definitive attitude toward marital silence. This indicates a genuine, tangible presence of the phenomenon as a lived reality, rather than an extreme condition or a complete absence.

Table (1): One-Sample t-test results testing hypotheses related to respondents' attitudes toward the dimensions of marital silence.

Dimensions	mean	t	df	Sig
Communicative silence	2.68	21.23	59	0.000
Affective silence	2.49	20.12	59	0.000
Interactive silence	2.76	21.53	59	0.000

The concentration of the statistically significant t-test results around the level of "moderate adoption" on the Likert scale carries profound sociological implications. It confirms that the family

within the study population is not experiencing a state of absolute rupture that typically precedes a formal divorce (which would have yielded extreme responses). Instead, it navigates a far more complex state of "cautious cohabitation" or what is termed "psychological divorce." The spouses maintain the structural and material framework of the family, yet they manage their conflicts and external pressures through tactical withdrawal.

Interactive silence emerges with the highest mean (2.76) and significance, illuminating that the domain of "conflict and decision-making" is the most severely compromised. Sociologically, this withdrawal is utilized by the husband as a tool to evade confrontation and freeze contentious debates. This reflects a clear evasion of shared responsibility, unfairly shifting the entire administrative and emotional burden unilaterally onto the wife. Such a dynamic is a stark manifestation of imbalanced interactive power structures.

This runs parallel to communicative silence (mean = 2.68), which provides statistical reliability regarding the erosion of routine, daily dialogues. Viewed through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, the failure to share simple daily details strips the domestic space of its shared human meanings, reducing the home to a mere station for fulfilling biological needs. This moderate level of silence implies the preservation of a bare minimum of functional, transactional speech necessary to sustain daily operations, while intimate and profound dialogue is entirely withheld.

Finally, the consistent significance of affective silence (mean = 2.49) affirms that emotional frigidity has become an institutionalized routine within the relationship. Although it scored relatively lower compared to the other dimensions—suggesting that brief flashes of emotional responsiveness might still surface during major crises—daily life remains overwhelmingly characterized by affective blunting.

In conclusion, these robust findings prove that marital silence is not an individual shortcoming. Rather, it is a maladaptive coping strategy imposed by a heavily pressured family structure incapable of establishing healthy negotiation channels. Consequently, the marriage is kept intact on paper, while fundamentally collapsing at its emotional core.

1.2 Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Communicative Dimension of Marital Silence:

The table illustrates the respondents' attitudes toward the communicative dimension of marital silence, recording an overall mean of 2.68 with a standard deviation of 0.98. Given the use of a 5-point Likert scale (where the value of 3 represents the midpoint frequency of "Sometimes"), this result reflects a moderate to slightly low frequency of verbal withdrawal.

Table (2): Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Communicative Dimension of Marital Silence

N	Items	mean	Std.
1	He prefers to remain silent upon returning home rather than talking to me.	2.38	1.32
2	He remains silent during meals without engaging in any conversation.	2.72	1.37
3	He avoids answering my questions by resorting to silence or dismissing the discussion.	2.73	1.53
4	He stays silent when I attempt to talk to him about daily or routine matters.	2.98	1.53
5	He shuts down communication when I try to discuss a specific topic.	2.57	1.47
	Total communicative silence	2.68	0.98

The source: Field study data, 2025.

Sociologically, it is highly significant that the statement regarding silence when discussing "daily or routine matters" recorded the highest mean (2.98). This confirms that communicative fracture originates from the erosion of simple, habitual conversations that serve as the cohesive glue

of the marital relationship. This distancing is further reinforced by tactical evasion in answering questions (2.73) and silence during mealtime rituals (2.72), gradually transforming shared spaces into areas of mutual isolation.

In contrast, the statement regarding "preferring silence upon returning home" recorded the lowest mean (2.38). This finding weakens the hypothesis that silence is merely an immediate physiological response to external occupational fatigue. Instead, it asserts that marital silence is a selective and interactive pattern, emerging as an active mechanism of withdrawal and avoidance that develops within the very structure of the spousal interaction itself.

1.3 Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Affective Dimension of Marital Silence

The table illustrates the respondents' attitudes toward the affective dimension of marital silence, recording an overall mean of 2.49 with a standard deviation of 0.96. Within the framework of a 5-point Likert scale, this score indicates a moderate to slightly low frequency of emotional withdrawal, suggesting that while affective silence is present, it does not completely dominate the marital dynamic.

Table (3): Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Affective Dimension of Marital Silence

N	Items	mean	Std.
1	His speech and actions lack any emotional expression upon returning	2.85	1.33
2	He does not share his personal feelings or thoughts with me.	2.45	1.41
3	He appears indifferent to discussing matters that concern me or the family.	2.35	1.39
4	He remains silent even in situations that require emotional expression.	2.53	1.42
5	I feel a complete absence of emotional interaction between us, even	2.27	1.35
	Total affective silence	2.49	0.96

The source: Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological perspective, it is highly significant that the highest mean (2.85) was recorded for the statement indicating a lack of emotional expression in speech and actions upon returning home. This suggests that the domestic sphere—traditionally conceptualized as a sanctuary for emotional replenishment—is frequently experienced by these women as a space characterized by affective blunting and routine detachment. This emotional barrier is further reinforced by the husband's tendency to remain silent in situations explicitly requiring emotional expression (2.53) and a general reluctance to share personal feelings (2.45), which gradually replaces emotional intimacy with a mere transactional form of cohabitation.

Conversely, the statement reflecting a "complete absence of emotional interaction, even during critical moments" recorded the lowest mean (2.27). This crucial nuance implies that while everyday emotional warmth is significantly eroded, a foundational level of affective responsiveness is often still triggered during severe crises, effectively preventing the absolute psychological collapse of the family unit.

1.4 Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Interactive Dimension of Marital Silence

The table illustrates the respondents' attitudes toward the interactive dimension of marital silence, recording an overall mean of 2.76 with a standard deviation of 0.99. Within the framework of a 5-point Likert scale, this score indicates a moderate level of interactive withdrawal, suggesting a palpable disruption in the couple's collaborative dynamics and mutual engagement.

Table (4): Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Interactive Dimension of Marital Silence

N	Items	mean	Std.
1	He avoids consultation or discussing the problems we face as a couple.	2.52	1.47
2	He does not initiate discussions regarding decisions that affect our family or	2.28	1.42
3	I am often forced to bring up topics myself, as he does not initiate any conversation.	3.27	1.36
4	He shows no interest in my opinion during decision-making.	2.40	1.40
5	He quickly shuts down the discussion when addressing contentious issues	3.32	1.56
Total interactive silence		2.76	0.99

The source: Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological standpoint, it is highly revealing that the most prominent manifestation of this dimension is the husband's tendency to "quickly shut down the discussion when addressing contentious issues," which recorded the highest mean of 3.32. This indicates that silence is actively deployed as a defensive avoidance strategy specifically designed to evade conflict resolution, effectively neutralizing the wife's attempts to address underlying grievances. This stonewalling is deeply compounded by a gendered imbalance in relational maintenance; the respondents reported being "often forced to bring up topics" themselves (recording the second-highest mean of 3.27). This highlights a severe asymmetry in interactional labor, where the female partner bears the overwhelming, unilateral burden of initiating dialogue and sustaining the relationship's communicative life support.

Conversely, statements related to broader, functional family management—such as initiating discussions regarding family decisions (2.28) and showing interest in the wife's opinion during decision-making (2.40)—recorded the lowest means within this dimension. This crucial distinction implies a compartmentalized form of withdrawal: while husbands heavily utilize silence to dodge emotional friction and contentious debates, a foundational level of logistical, task-oriented interaction concerning the household's practical operations remains partially intact.

1.5 The Effect of Age on the Degree of Marital Silence

Statistically, the data clearly indicate a lack of significant differences among the distinct age brackets across all measured dimensions—communicative, affective, and interactive—given that all significance values (Sig.) exceeded the 0.05 threshold.

Table (5): The Effect of Age on the Degree of Marital Silence

Dimensions	Categories	N	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Communicative silence	Less than 30 years	13	2.44	0.86	1.466	0.239
	30 to 45 years	39	2.83	1.01		
	Over 45 years	8	2.30	0.91		
Affective silence	Less than 30 years	13	2.33	0.76	0.226	0.799
	30 to 45 years	39	2.51	0.98		
	Over 45 years	8	2.60	1.19		
Interactive silence	Less than 30 years	13	2.60	0.88	0.205	0.816
	30 to 45 years	39	2.80	1.06		
	Over 45 years	8	2.77	0.86		

The source: Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological perspective, this statistical outcome is profoundly telling. It corroborates that marital silence is neither a generational anomaly nor a condition exclusively bound to a specific

developmental or chronological phase. Instead, it manifests as a deep-seated structural crisis and a relational dynamic capable of permeating every stage of the family system's life cycle.

Nevertheless, a granular reading of the arithmetic means reveals that the 30 to 45 age cohort registered the highest averages in both the communicative (2.83) and interactive (2.80) dimensions of silence. Sociologically, this trend can be attributed to the acute pressures characteristic of this specific family life-cycle stage. This period typically aligns with a convergence of peak socio-economic demands, including intensive child-rearing, aggressive career advancement, and mounting financial obligations. Ultimately, these suffocating external stressors infiltrate the domestic environment, prompting spouses to adopt the severance of dialogue and interactive withdrawal as passive defensive mechanisms to manage cumulative daily exhaustion.

Conversely, affective silence demonstrated a gradual upward trajectory, reaching its peak within the over-45 demographic (mean = 2.60). This shift likely reflects a pervasive "emotional routine" or affective distancing that solidifies after prolonged years of cohabitation. Ultimately, chronological age alone does not erect the barriers of silence; rather, it is the unique constellation of structural pressures and socially prescribed roles accompanying each developmental stage that consistently reproduces this withdrawal in its diverse manifestations.

1.6 The Effect of the Wife's Educational Level on the Degree of Marital Silence

The results indicate no significant differences across the educational categories (Primary, Middle, Secondary, University) for any of the dimensions, as all significance values (Sig.) exceed the standard 0.05 threshold (0.08 for communicative, 1.00 for affective, and 0.69 for interactive silence).

Table (6): The Effect of the Wife's Educational Level on the Degree of Marital Silence

Dimensions	Categories	N	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Communicative silence	Primary	5	2.12	0.69	2.33	0.08
	Middle	8	3.43	0.98		
	Secondary	18	2.62	0.78		
	University	29	2.60	1.05		
Affective silence	Primary	5	2.48	0.23	0.02	1.00
	Middle	8	2.43	1.13		
	Secondary	18	2.52	0.94		
	University	29	2.49	1.03		
Interactive silence	Primary	5	2.48	0.41	0.49	0.69
	Middle	8	3.10	1.04		
	Secondary	18	2.67	0.94		
	University	29	2.77	1.09		

The source: Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological standpoint, this lack of statistical significance is highly revealing. It suggests that marital silence is a pervasive relational dynamic that transcends formal educational boundaries. For instance, the affective withdrawal experienced by university-educated wives (mean = 2.49) is virtually identical to that experienced by those with only primary education (mean = 2.48). This indicates that higher academic attainment does not necessarily equip spouses with superior emotional negotiation tools, nor does it shield the marital unit from affective blunting and routine detachment.

However, a closer examination of the arithmetic means highlights an intriguing anomaly: wives within the "Middle" school educational bracket recorded the highest levels of both

communicative (3.43) and interactive (3.10) silence. Sociologically, this could reflect a transitional demographic group experiencing unique socio-cultural cross-pressures. These women may possess shifting marital expectations that clash with traditional gender roles, creating communication friction that disrupts everyday dialogue and joint decision-making more severely than in other educational cohorts.

Ultimately, the data underscores that marital silence operates as a universal relational vulnerability. It is shaped predominantly by internal dyadic interactions and domestic stressors rather than being mitigated or exacerbated by the wife's academic credentials.

1.7 The Effect of the Wife's Income on the Degree of Marital Silence

The results reveal no significant differences among the income categories across all dimensions, as the significance values (Sig.) for communicative (0.26), affective (0.32), and interactive silence (0.30) all comfortably exceed the standard 0.05 threshold.

Table (7): The Effect of the Wife's Income on the Degree of Marital Silence

Dimensions	Categories	N	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Communicative silence	Less than 40,000 DZD	14	2.53	0.95	1.40	0.26
	40,000 to 60,000 DZD	26	2.85	1.04		
	More than 60,000 DZD	3	1.93	0.12		
Affective silence	Less than 40,000 DZD	14	2.49	1.02	1.16	0.32
	40,000 to 60,000 DZD	26	2.70	1.02		
	More than 60,000 DZD	3	1.80	0.53		
Interactive silence	Less than 40,000 DZD	14	2.61	0.84	1.25	0.30
	40,000 to 60,000 DZD	26	2.97	1.11		
	More than 60,000 DZD	3	2.13	0.64		

The source : Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological perspective, while the overarching statistical differences are not deemed significant, a closer examination of the arithmetic means unveils a compelling, non-linear trend. Wives situated within the middle-income bracket (40,000 to 60,000 DZD) consistently recorded the highest levels of silence across all domains: communicative (2.85), affective (2.70), and interactive (2.97). This peak can be sociologically interpreted through the lens of the "dual burden" or "second shift." Women in this specific economic bracket often experience intense work-related stress coupled with traditional domestic responsibilities, yet they may lack the extensive financial leverage required to outsource household labor. This intersection of high pressure and limited relief frequently leads to exhaustion and subsequent communicative withdrawal.

Conversely, women in the highest income bracket (more than 60,000 DZD) reported remarkably lower averages across all dimensions, with means dropping significantly (e.g., 1.80 for affective silence). This stark contrast suggests that elevated financial independence and a substantial economic contribution to the household may actively empower wives, fostering a more egalitarian marital dynamic. Such economic leverage likely enhances their negotiation power, psychological security, and voice within the relationship, thereby significantly mitigating the adoption of silence as a passive defensive mechanism.

1.8 The Effect of the Income Disparity Between Spouses on the Degree of Marital Silence

Statistically, this variable yields highly significant results, standing in stark contrast to other demographic factors. The data reveals statistically significant differences in both communicative silence ($F = 6.61$, $\text{Sig.} = 0.00$) and interactive silence ($F = 3.56$, $\text{Sig.} = 0.04$), as their significance values fall well below the 0.05 threshold. Affective silence, while following a similar trend, did not reach formal statistical significance ($\text{Sig.} = 0.37$).

Table (8): The Effect of the Income Disparity Between Spouses on the Degree of Marital Silence

Dimensions	Categories	N	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.
Communicative silence	The wife's income is higher	13	2.44	0.86	1.466	0.239
	The husband's income is higher	39	2.83	1.01		
	The incomes are equal	8	2.30	0.91		
Affective silence	The wife's income is higher	13	2.33	0.76	0.226	0.799
	The husband's income is higher	39	2.51	0.98		
	The incomes are equal	8	2.60	1.19		
Interactive silence	The wife's income is higher	13	2.60	0.88	0.205	0.816
	The husband's income is higher	39	2.80	1.06		
	The incomes are equal	8	2.77	0.86		

The source: Field study data, 2025.

From a sociological perspective, the arithmetic means expose a profound structural friction: households where the wife's income is higher experience drastically elevated levels of silence, peaking at 3.87 for communicative and 3.77 for interactive dimensions. This acute withdrawal can be analyzed through the disruption of traditional patriarchal norms. When a wife achieves higher economic standing or a superior occupational position, it fundamentally subverts the deeply ingrained cultural expectation of the male provider, which frequently triggers feelings of frustration and jealousy within the husband.

Consequently, the male partner may deploy silence not merely as an avoidance tactic, but as a passive-aggressive mechanism to reassert dominance or express resistance to the inverted power dynamic. By shutting down daily dialogue and consciously withdrawing from joint household decision-making, he effectively penalizes the wife for her economic superiority. Conversely, when incomes are equal or the husband earns more, the levels of silence drop significantly and stabilize. This sharp contrast indicates that traditional economic configurations—or strict financial parity—generate far less relational tension and foster a much more communicative and interactive domestic environment.

2. Discussion of the Study Findings in Light of the Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework

The statistical and sociological processing of the field data reveals a profoundly complex landscape regarding contemporary family interaction dynamics. Concerning the primary non-directional hypothesis, the One-Sample t-test results confirmed a statistically significant difference (Sig. = 0.000) between the average attitude of married women in the city of Souk Ahras toward marital silence and the hypothetical mean of the measurement scale (which is 3). The calculated arithmetic means across all dimensions ranged from 2.49 to 2.76, hovering slightly below the neutral midpoint. Sociologically, this deviation from the hypothetical mean does not signify a complete relational rupture or an impending formal divorce; rather, it indicates the solid establishment of "cautious cohabitation" or "psychological divorce." Spouses deliberately adopt a moderate but tangible level of withdrawal to maintain the structural integrity of the household while actively evading direct, exhausting friction.

This overarching reality becomes clearer when evaluating the first sub-hypothesis, which tested the difference concerning communicative marital silence. The data confirmed a statistically significant difference (mean = 2.68). Viewed through the theoretical lens of Symbolic Interactionism, this communicative fracture—particularly the evasion of "daily and routine matters"—represents a severe collapse in the shared meanings and symbols that traditionally construct domestic intimacy. The home ceases to be a vibrant arena for human exchange and shrinks into a mere logistical station. This finding aligns with the symptomatic observations of Salhi and Sebti (2023) and Mohammed (2021), who also recorded high levels of "marital dumbness" and communicative void. However, our sociological interpretation fundamentally diverges from their conclusions. While Mohammed (2021) and Salhi and Sebti (2023) adopted a somewhat linear,

technologically deterministic approach—blaming the excessive use of new media for this silence—the current study argues that digital isolation is merely a symptom or an escape tool, not the root cause. The refusal to speak is an active, deeply intentional relational stance driven by structural domestic exhaustion, not just screen addiction.

Regarding the third sub-hypothesis, the test confirmed a statistically significant difference in attitudes toward interactive marital silence, which notably recorded the highest mean among all dimensions (2.76). This indicates that the domain of conflict resolution and joint decision-making is the most severely paralyzed. This statistical reality perfectly mirrors the "demand/withdraw" interactive pattern identified by Li and Johnson (2016). In this dynamic, the wife is structurally forced to shoulder the interactional labor (the "demander"), while the husband utilizes interactive stonewalling as a defensive shield (the "withdrawer") to freeze contentious debates. Furthermore, this aligns with the conclusions of Ben Lghou et al. (2024), who framed interactive withdrawal as a conflict-avoidance mechanism. Yet, by moving beyond interpersonal psychology into structural sociology, we interpret this interactive silence not merely as a lack of relational skills or poor partner selection, but as a manifestation of imbalanced power structures where evasion is weaponized to unfairly shift administrative burdens unilaterally onto the female partner.

In testing the second sub-hypothesis, the data revealed a statistically significant difference regarding affective marital silence, though it registered the lowest relative mean (2.49). This nuanced result suggests a pervasive "emotional routine" and affective blunting upon the husband's return home, yet indicates that a baseline of emotional responsiveness is pragmatically preserved to prevent total systemic disintegration. This aligns seamlessly with the concept of "protective silence" discussed by Dlamini and Okonkwo (2024). From a Systems Theory perspective, total affective severance would lead to the immediate destruction of the family unit. Therefore, wives often endure this emotional deprivation and adopt their own mutual silence to regulate domestic anxiety, shield their children from the fallout of chronic conflict, and survive highly coercive or unequal environments without escalating into overt emotional danger.

Ultimately, the deepest sociological explanation for these confirmed hypotheses lies not in the age or educational level of the spouses—which yielded no statistically significant differences—but in the structural variable of income disparity. The data exposed that households where the wife's income is higher experience drastically elevated levels of silence, peaking at 3.87. Deciphering this critical anomaly necessitates the application of Conflict Theory. A wife's economic superiority fundamentally subverts deeply ingrained cultural and patriarchal expectations of the male provider. Consequently, the male partner does not deploy silence merely as a passive avoidance tactic, but as a punitive, passive-aggressive mechanism. By shutting down daily dialogue and withdrawing from joint decision-making, he expresses resistance to the inverted power dynamic, attempting to reassert a threatened dominance and artificially penalize the wife for her financial independence.

In conclusion, comparing these findings with previous literature confirms that marital silence in the Algerian context cannot be pathologized strictly as unassertiveness, clinical depression, or simple technological distraction. It is a highly active, multidimensional strategy of resistance and adaptation, firmly embedded within the structural power imbalances, shifting gender roles, and economic frictions of the modern family system.

IV- Conclusion:

The investigation into marital silence among women in Souk Ahras fundamentally challenges the traditional paradigm that views relational withdrawal merely as a deficit in interpersonal skills. What emerges from the sociological processing of the field data is a far more complex portrait of domestic life. Marital silence, rather than being an empty void, functions as an active, highly calculated behavioral strategy. It is an instrument deeply embedded within the

structural fabric of the family, utilized to navigate, and sometimes endure, profound imbalances in domestic power. The surveyed wives described a reality of "cautious cohabitation," where silence is not indicative of an impending formal divorce, but rather a mechanism to maintain the superficial, logistical integrity of the household while the emotional core collapses.

Through the deconstruction of this phenomenon into three distinct dimensions, the data painted a nuanced picture of relational survival. Interactive silence emerged as the most severely compromised domain. Husbands frequently weaponize this specific form of withdrawal to freeze contentious debates and evade conflict resolution. By doing so, they force their partners to shoulder an overwhelming, unilateral burden of relational maintenance. Parallel to this, communicative silence steadily erodes the daily, mundane interactions that traditionally build intimacy, stripping the shared physical space of its underlying human connection. Interestingly, affective silence recorded the lowest relative averages, suggesting a pragmatic, perhaps unconscious, effort to retain a baseline of emotional responsiveness during severe crises to prevent total systemic disintegration.

Crucially, this study demonstrates that marital silence operates independently of generational shifts or academic credentials, as age and educational levels yielded no statistically significant variations. The true catalyst for this phenomenon lies in structural economic friction. The data unequivocally revealed that households experiencing an inverted income disparity—specifically, where the wife out-earns her husband—suffer from the most acute levels of communicative and interactive withdrawal. In these specific domestic configurations, a woman's financial superiority directly subverts deeply ingrained patriarchal expectations. Unable to assert dominance through the traditional role of primary provider, the male partner frequently resorts to passive-aggressive stonewalling. Silence is thus repurposed as a punitive mechanism, an unspoken retaliation designed to marginalize the financially independent wife and artificially restore a threatened hierarchy.

Addressing a pathology of this structural magnitude requires moving far beyond the scope of conventional, individualistic psychological counseling. The findings underscore an urgent, critical need for "systemic family counseling" models that explicitly tackle the restructuring of domestic power balances and the realignment of gendered expectations. Furthermore, proactive interventions, such as pre-marital qualification workshops, must be prioritized to equip future spouses with egalitarian conflict-management strategies that actively dismantle defensive withdrawal patterns before they calcify.

While these conclusions offer vital insights into the lived realities of Algerian women, objective self-criticism necessitates acknowledging the study's boundaries. The reliance on a non-probability snowball sample of sixty wives inherently restricts the broader generalizability of the statistical inferences. More importantly, capturing only the female perspective provides a profoundly unilateral reading of what is, by definition, a bilateral interactional dynamic. Additionally, attempting to decode a highly localized, culturally specific phenomenon through Western-centric psychological frameworks occasionally proved theoretically restrictive.

Consequently, to build upon this foundational inquiry, future scholarly endeavors must actively pivot toward dyadic research designs. Simultaneously surveying both spouses will be paramount in capturing the mutual, reciprocal mechanics of marital dumbness. Integrating qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth clinical interviews, will also be essential to transcend quantitative metrics and fully explore the complex, emotional architecture of families trapped in silence

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