

Silent Treatment in Millennial Families: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Islamic Family Law and Symbolic Interactionism in Medan, Indonesia

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Abstract: Silent treatment has become a significant communication problem in millennial families because it can create emotional distance, misunderstanding, and unresolved marital conflict. Previous studies have generally examined silent treatment separately from psychological, communication, or legal perspectives. However, research integrating Islamic family law and symbolic interactionism, particularly among millennial families in Medan, remains limited. This study aims to examine the forms and meanings of silent treatment, its implications under Islamic family law, and its interpretation through symbolic interactionism. This study employed empirical legal research using a socio-legal approach. Primary data were collected from 11 millennial married participants in Medan through in-depth interviews and an online questionnaire. Secondary data were obtained from the Qur'an, hadith, the Compilation of Islamic Law, legislation, and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal two main patterns of silence. First, temporary silence is used to regulate emotions, prevent harmful speech, and prepare for constructive dialogue. Second, prolonged silence is used as punishment, pressure, or emotional withdrawal and can lead to dysfunctional communication. Temporary silence may be acceptable when its purpose and duration are clearly communicated and dialogue is subsequently reopened. Conversely, prolonged punitive silence is inconsistent with *mu'asyarah bil-ma'ruf* and the Islamic ideals of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Symbolic interactionism demonstrates that differences between the intended and received meanings of silence can generate negative assumptions and emotional distance. This study contributes an integrated socio-legal framework for distinguishing constructive emotional pauses from harmful silent treatment based on their purpose, duration, effects, and the reopening of communication.



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Introduction

Marriage in Islam is a strong covenant intended to build a peaceful, loving, and mutually supportive family life. This purpose is reflected in the concept of a family based on *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, which places the relationship between husband and wife within spiritual, social, and legal dimensions. The Qur'an explains that spouses were created so that people may find peace, love, and compassion in married life (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Therefore, marriage should not only be understood as a formal relationship that legalizes living together but also as a space for developing communication, mutual respect, cooperation, and responsibility between spouses.

Communication plays an important role in maintaining family harmony. Through communication, spouses can express their feelings, needs, expectations, concerns, and possible solutions to conflicts that arise in married life. Open communication enables spouses

to develop mutual understanding and prevent negative assumptions. In contrast, communication barriers can cause misunderstandings, emotional tension, and psychological distance that reduce the quality of the marital relationship. In modern families, communication problems have become increasingly complex because they are influenced by work pressure, social mobility, digital technology, and changing patterns of interaction between spouses. Current evidence indicates that recurring demand-withdraw patterns are associated with lower relational satisfaction, although their effects may vary according to socioeconomic context and the topic of conflict (Mosley et al., 2025; Rosen et al., 2025; Ross et al., 2019).

Millennial families are important to study because they live in a dynamic social environment that is strongly influenced by technological development. This generation has different communication patterns from previous generations because it is accustomed to digital communication, rapid responses, and more individual forms of self-expression. On the one hand, these developments can provide more opportunities for family communication. On the other hand, urban pressures, work responsibilities, emotional expectations, and different approaches to conflict resolution may create unhealthy communication patterns. One form of dysfunctional communication that may occur in millennial families is silent treatment.

Silent treatment refers to deliberately remaining silent, ignoring a spouse, or refusing to communicate in response to conflict, disappointment, or disagreement. This behaviour may take the form of refusing to answer questions, avoiding emotional contact, limiting physical interaction, or reducing responses to a spouse's needs. Although silent treatment is sometimes considered a way to calm down or avoid an argument, it can cause psychological consequences, including feelings of isolation, confusion, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and poor interpersonal relationships (Hasna, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). As a form of relational ostracism, prolonged silence may threaten belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence while producing guilt and emotional distress (Dvir et al., 2026; Scarci et al., 2026; Williams & Nida, 2022).

From the perspective of Islamic family law, the relationship between husband and wife must be based on the principle of *mu'āsarah bil ma'rūf*, which requires spouses to treat each other properly, respectfully, and kindly. This principle requires healthy communication, mutual understanding, and the avoidance of emotional neglect. Article 77 paragraph (1) of the Compilation of Islamic Law states that spouses have a noble responsibility to establish a family based on *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Article 77 paragraph (2) further requires spouses to love, respect, and remain faithful to each other while providing physical and emotional support. These provisions show that communication is not merely a psychological need but also part of the moral and legal obligations of spouses in an Islamic family (Jalil, 2026; Widodo et al., 2023).

Islamic jurisprudence recognizes the concept of *hajr*, which refers to temporarily distancing oneself or limiting interaction under certain conditions, particularly in cases

involving *nusyūz*. However, *hajr* permitted under Islamic law has educational and corrective purposes. It should not be used to hurt, punish, or prolong conflict. Temporary silence intended to calm emotions must therefore be distinguished from prolonged silent treatment intended to place emotional pressure on a spouse. Prolonged refusal to communicate is also inconsistent with the Islamic encouragement to restore peace and repair social and family relationships as soon as possible.

Silent treatment can also be examined through symbolic interactionism. This theory explains that human actions are shaped by meanings developed through social interaction. In family life, words, facial expressions, actions, and even silence can become symbols interpreted by a spouse. Problems arise when the person remaining silent and the spouse receiving the silence interpret it differently. One spouse may view silence as a way to calm down, while the other may interpret it as rejection, hatred, punishment, or the loss of affection. These different interpretations can distort communication and intensify marital conflict (Efendi et al., 2024; Saidah et al., 2026).

Previous studies have examined silent treatment from psychological, communication, and legal perspectives. These studies indicate that silent treatment may be associated with expressions of anger, psychological violence within the household, the concept of *al-hajr*, and family relationship problems in the digital era (A'rifah et al., 2025; Pratista et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). Research on Qur'anic values in addressing silent treatment also shows that this phenomenon needs to be understood through religious and social approaches at the same time (Azizah & Sulidar, 2025). However, limited research has specifically examined silent treatment among millennial families in Medan by combining Islamic family law with symbolic interactionism. International research commonly conceptualises this behaviour through the demand-withdraw pattern, in which one partner pursues discussion while the other limits engagement. This pattern is associated with individual, relational, and communicative outcomes and may be influenced by attachment and conflict structure (Schrodt et al., 2014; Seedall, 2024).

Based on this research gap, the present study addresses three main questions. First, what are the characteristics and patterns of silent treatment among millennial families in Medan? Second, how is this phenomenon viewed from the perspective of Islamic family law? Third, how can the symbolic meaning of silence in marital relationships be understood through symbolic interactionism? Accordingly, this study aims to analyse silent treatment as a form of dysfunctional communication in millennial families and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital conflict resolution based on communication, Islamic family law, and the symbolic interpretation of interactions between spouses.

Research Methods

This study employed empirical legal research using a socio-legal approach. This approach was selected because the study examined not only the normative provisions of

Islamic family law but also the practice and interpretation of silent treatment in the daily lives of married couples. The research was conducted in Medan and its surrounding urban areas, North Sumatra, from May to June 2026. The study focused on the relationship between the participants' experiences, Islamic family law, and the symbolic meanings produced through marital interaction. Primary data were obtained through an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were collected from the Qur'an, hadith, the Compilation of Islamic Law, relevant legislation, court decisions, books, and academic articles concerning silent treatment, family communication, *al-hajr*, Islamic family law, and symbolic interactionism.

The study involved 11 married participants selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) belong to the millennial generation; (2) be legally married and reside in Medan or its surrounding areas; (3) have been married for at least two years; (4) have experienced, practised, or directly encountered silent treatment in their marital relationship; and (5) be willing to participate voluntarily in the research. Recruitment began with the distribution of a Google Forms questionnaire through digital communication networks. Eleven eligible respondents completed the questionnaire and subsequently participated in the in-depth interviews. The questionnaire functioned as an initial screening and descriptive-mapping instrument by collecting information about the participants' demographic characteristics and the forms, duration, causes, and effects of silent treatment. The interviews were then used to explore and clarify the questionnaire responses, particularly the participants' intentions, emotional experiences, interpretations of silence, conflict-resolution strategies, and willingness to reopen communication. Thus, the questionnaire provided an initial overview, while the interviews constituted the primary source of qualitative data for the analysis.

The data were analysed qualitatively through data reduction, coding, thematic categorisation, data presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings were classified according to the forms, triggering factors, purposes, duration, effects, and reopening of communication after a period of silence. These themes were used to distinguish temporary silence as a form of emotional regulation from prolonged silence used as punishment, pressure, or emotional withdrawal. The empirical findings were then examined using the principles of *mu'āsyaarah bil-ma'rūf*, *al-hajr*, *iṣlāḥ*, *sakinah–mawaddah–rahmah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Symbolic interactionism was also applied to analyse differences between the meaning intended by the person remaining silent and the meaning interpreted by their spouse (Efendi et al., 2024; Saidah et al., 2026). Before data collection, participants received information regarding the research objectives, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and use of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and they were allowed to withdraw at any stage. To protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, all participant names presented in this article are pseudonyms. Potentially

identifying information was limited, and the collected data were used solely for academic purposes.

Result and Discussion

Forms and Patterns of Silent Treatment in Millennial Families

The findings show that silent treatment among millennial families in Medan takes various forms and differs in duration, triggering factors, and the meanings given to it by each spouse. Based on in-depth interviews and online questionnaires, silent treatment mainly appeared as reduced verbal communication, emotional withdrawal, limited physical interaction, avoidance of conversation, and temporary distancing during marital conflict. However, remaining silent was not always intended as a form of emotional punishment. Some participants used silence as a temporary strategy to calm themselves, control their emotions, avoid saying hurtful words, and prepare for a more rational conversation after their emotional condition had improved. These findings indicate that silent treatment in family life cannot always be understood as a negative behaviour because its purpose, duration, and effects differ among couples (Hasna, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025).

The duration of silence also varied considerably. Some participants remained silent for approximately 20 minutes or several hours, while others did so for one or two days. Several participants did not use silent treatment at all because they preferred direct communication when dealing with conflict. These findings suggest that most of the practices identified in this study did not involve long-term communication withdrawal. Instead, silence was more often used as an emotional pause before communication was reopened. Longitudinal and home-based research indicates that withdrawal and avoidance vary across relationship contexts and life stages, while recurrent withdrawal may impede conflict resolution and intensify negative emotions (Holley et al., 2013; Papp et al., 2009).

Table 1. Characteristics and Silent Treatment Patterns of the Participants

Participant	Age/ Length of Marriage	Area	Occupation	Duration of Silent Treatment	Triggering Factor
Yesi	31 years/2 years	Medan Johor	Private- sector employee	Did not use it	Prioritised open communication
AR	28 years/2 years	Medan Helvetia	Civil servant	1–2 days	Self-reflection and calming the mind
Syahputra	31 years/2 years	Medan Tembung	Religious teacher	1–2 hours	Calming emotions

Nuri	33 years/5 years	Medan Denai	Teacher	Approximately 20 minutes	Emotional and work-related exhaustion
Dina	36 years/9 years	Medan Estate	Teacher	Did not use it	Preferred direct communication
Ety Pohan	35 years/12 years	Percut Sei Tuan	Teacher	Several hours	Disappointment and avoidance of arguments
Rahmad	35 years/8 years	Medan Tembung	Employee	Temporary	Calming down
Indriani	43 years/25 years	Medan Kota	Homemaker	1–2 hours	Avoiding arguments
Mala Sari	38 years/15 years	Medan Kota	Entrepreneur	2–3 hours	Controlling emotions
Mayu	35 years/11 years	Medan Kota	Homemaker	1 day	Self-reflection
Sri Fauziah	29 years/4 years	Medan Denai	Teacher	Varied	Disappointment and misunderstanding

Source: Primary data processed from interviews and online questionnaires, 2026.

The use of silence as a method of emotional control was clearly reflected in Syahputra's experience. He acknowledged that he had chosen not to communicate for one or two hours during a conflict with his spouse. He explained, "I remain silent only to calm the situation when we are both angry" (Syahputra, personal communication, 23 May 2026). This statement shows that his silence was not intended to punish his spouse but to prevent the conflict from developing into a more serious verbal argument. After both parties had calmed down, they resumed communication and discussed the problem.

A similar pattern was found in Nuri's experience. Emotional exhaustion, work demands, and family responsibilities encouraged her to take a relatively brief communication break. She explained, "A brief period of silence to calm down is understandable, but if it continues without any explanation, it can easily hurt the other person and prevent the problem from being resolved" (Nuri, personal communication, 25 May 2026). Her statement shows an awareness of the difference between silence as a form of self-control and silence that may become emotional neglect. Therefore, the main issue is not merely the act of remaining silent but whether the spouses are willing to reopen communication after the pause.

Aziz Ramadhan demonstrated a somewhat different pattern because his period of silence could last for one or two days. He viewed it as an opportunity for self-reflection and for calming his thoughts before communicating again. However, he also recognised that the behaviour could create difficulties for his spouse. According to him, silent treatment makes a spouse “keep guessing what we mean and what we actually want” (A. Ramadhan, personal communication, 20 June 2026). This experience indicates that a person’s intention to calm down does not always produce the same meaning for the spouse receiving the silence.

Some participants clearly stated that they did not use silent treatment. Dina preferred to resolve every conflict through direct communication. She explained, “Whenever an argument occurs, we always choose to communicate directly, explain our feelings, and find a solution together. Remaining silent does not communicate our feelings clearly, so it is better to discuss the problem directly” (Dina, personal communication, 20 June 2026). This view demonstrates that some millennial families tend to resolve conflict through dialogue and regard open communication as an important foundation for family harmony.

Overall, the main factors that encouraged silence included emotional exhaustion, work pressure, differences of opinion, disappointment with a spouse, the need for self-reflection, and the desire to avoid a more serious argument. These findings show that the dynamics of urban family life influence how millennial couples manage conflict. Silence may function as an adaptive mechanism when it is brief and followed by dialogue. However, it can develop into dysfunctional communication when it lasts too long, is not accompanied by an explanation, or is deliberately used to place emotional pressure on a spouse.

Analytical Distinction between Temporary Emotional Regulation and Prolonged Punitive Withdrawal

The findings indicate that silence in marital conflict cannot be evaluated solely based on whether verbal communication temporarily stops. Its meaning and consequences must be assessed through four interrelated indicators: purpose, duration, effect on the spouse, and the reopening of communication. Based on these indicators, the findings distinguish temporary emotional regulation from prolonged punitive withdrawal.

Analytical indicator	Temporary emotional regulation	Prolonged punitive withdrawal
Purpose	To calm emotions, prevent harmful speech, reflect on the conflict, and prepare for constructive dialogue.	To punish, control, pressure, ignore, or force the spouse to comply with particular demands.
Duration	Brief and reasonably limited, ranging from approximately 20 minutes to several hours, although some participants reported one or two days.	Indefinite, repeatedly extended, or continued beyond a reasonable cooling-off period without an agreed time limit.

Effect	May reduce conflict escalation and help spouses respond more rationally, although it can still create temporary uncertainty when no explanation is provided.	Produces anxiety, confusion, rejection, emotional distance, psychological pressure, and possible neglect of the spouse's emotional rights.
Reopening communication	Communication is consciously reopened after emotions have subsided, followed by explanation, dialogue, and problem-solving.	There is no clear commitment to resume communication, or communication resumes only when the silent spouse wishes to speak or the other spouse submits.

These indicators must be assessed cumulatively because duration alone does not automatically determine whether silence is constructive or harmful. A relatively brief period of silence may still be perceived as punishment when it occurs without explanation and causes emotional uncertainty. Conversely, a longer pause may remain an emotional-regulation strategy when both spouses understand its purpose, agree on its limits, and subsequently reopen dialogue. Nevertheless, the longer silence continues without clarification, the greater the likelihood that it will be interpreted as rejection, punishment, or emotional neglect.

Most participants in this study demonstrated a pattern closer to temporary emotional regulation. Their silence was generally intended to prevent further conflict, regulate emotional reactions, and create space for reflection. However, the findings also show that this behaviour may shift towards punitive withdrawal when its original purpose changes, its duration becomes uncertain, it creates psychological pressure, and communication is not reopened. Therefore, the distinction between constructive and dysfunctional silence depends on the interaction between intention and relational consequences rather than on intention alone.

This four-dimensional distinction constitutes the analytical contribution of the study. It connects empirical family experiences with Islamic family law and symbolic interactionism. From the perspective of Islamic family law, temporary silence may be acceptable when it supports self-control and reconciliation, while punitive withdrawal conflicts with *mu'āsarah bil-ma'rūf, iṣlāḥ*, and the protection of psychological well-being. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, silence becomes dysfunctional when the meaning intended by the person remaining silent differs from the meaning received by their spouse and is not clarified through subsequent communication (A'rifah et al., 2025; Jalil, 2026; Pratista et al., 2025).

Silent Treatment from the Perspective of Islamic Family Law

From the perspective of Islamic family law, the relationship between husband and wife is established not only through a legal bond but also through love, respect, responsibility, and proper treatment. Marriage in Islam is intended to create a family based on *sakinah*,

mawaddah, and *rahmah*. The normative foundation of this purpose is stated in Surah Ar-Rūm [30]: 21:

Meaning: “Among His signs is that He created spouses for you from among yourselves so that you may find peace in them. He has placed love and compassion between you. Indeed, in this are signs for people who reflect” (QS. Ar-Rūm [30]: 21).

This verse shows that tranquillity (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*), and compassion (*rahmah*) are the foundations of married life. These three elements are not realised merely through the formal existence of a marriage bond but also through healthy interpersonal relationships, mutual respect, openness, and communication between husband and wife. In the context of silent treatment, prolonged silence that causes a spouse to feel ignored may prevent the creation of peace and emotional closeness, which are among the main purposes of marriage.

This principle is strengthened by Article 77 paragraph (1) of the Compilation of Islamic Law, which states that husband and wife have a noble responsibility to establish a family based on *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Article 77 paragraph (2) further provides that spouses must love, respect, and remain faithful to one another while offering physical and emotional support. These provisions show that communication is not merely a psychological need within marriage but also part of the moral and legal obligations of spouses.

The principle of treating one’s spouse properly is also stated in Surah An-Nisā’ [4]: 19: Meaning: “O believers, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will. You must not treat them harshly in order to take back part of what you have given them, unless they commit a clear immoral act. Live with them honourably. If you dislike them, be patient, for you may dislike something in which Allah has placed much goodness” (QS. An-Nisā’ [4]: 19).

The phrase (*wa ‘āsyirūhunna bil-ma’rūf*) provides the foundation for the principle of *mu‘āsyarah bil ma’rūf*, which requires spouses to treat one another kindly, properly, and respectfully. This principle requires openness, concern for a spouse’s psychological condition, and a willingness to resolve conflict constructively. Therefore, silent treatment deliberately used to punish, pressure, humiliate, or ignore a spouse for a prolonged period is inconsistent with *mu‘āsyarah bil ma’rūf*. By contrast, remaining silent for a limited period to control emotions may be understood as self-control, provided that it does not remove the spouse’s rights and that communication is reopened after the situation becomes more conducive.

The field findings illustrate this distinction. Ety Pohan acknowledged that she sometimes chose to remain silent when she felt disappointed with her spouse. However, her silence was not intended to end the relationship or punish her spouse for an extended period. She explained, “I only want him to know that I do not like what happened and that I am upset. In my opinion, the key to a healthy relationship is maintaining love and good communication between us” (E. Pohan, personal communication, 20 June 2026). This statement shows that silence appeared as a temporary expression of emotion, while communication remained the primary mechanism for resolving conflict.

Rahmad expressed a similar view and understood silence as a temporary means of calming down. He stated, "Usually, people remain silent only to calm themselves. Communication is important, and husband and wife must communicate. Silence should only be used to restore peace; if it continues beyond that, it is not good" (Rahmad, personal communication, 26 May 2026). This finding shows that the participant distinguished between a temporary communication break intended to regulate emotions and prolonged silence directed at a spouse.

Within Islamic family law, temporary distancing during marital conflict may also be connected to the concept of *al-hajr*. One of its normative foundations appears in Surah An-Nisā' [4]: 34, particularly in the section addressing *nusyūz*:

Meaning: "As for women whose *nusyūz* you fear, advise them, leave them in their beds, and, if required under the relevant Islamic legal provisions, take the next step. However, if they obey you, do not seek a way to harm them. Indeed, Allah is Most High and Most Great" (QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 34).

The phrase relevant to this study is:

wa-hjurūhunna fī al-maḍāji'

which means "and leave them in their beds." The concept of *al-hajr* in this verse has a specific context as one stage in addressing *nusyūz*. Therefore, it cannot be understood as permission to remain silent, ignore a spouse, or impose emotional pressure without any limit. Its purpose is corrective and directed towards *iṣlāḥ*, or the restoration of the relationship, rather than the expression of anger or psychological punishment. Silent treatment driven by ego, the desire to control, or the intention to cause emotional suffering cannot simply be equated with *al-hajr* as recognised in Islamic family law (A'rifah et al., 2025; Pratista et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025).

The prohibition against prolonged interpersonal estrangement is reinforced by a hadith narrated by *Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī*:

Meaning: The hadith explains that a Muslim should not maintain estrangement from another Muslim for more than three nights and that the better party is the one who initiates reconciliation through a greeting of peace. This hadith is recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb al-Hijrah*, Hadith No. 6077, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Kitāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah wa al-Ādāb*, *Bāb Taḥrīm al-Hajr Fawqa Thalāth bi-lā 'Udhr Shar'ī*, Hadith No. 2560a (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, n.d.).

Although the hadith addresses relationships among Muslims in general, its ethical principle is particularly relevant to marriage because spouses have stronger responsibilities of affection, emotional support, and proper treatment. The hadith should not be interpreted as permitting spouses to remain silent for three days in every marital conflict. Instead, it establishes an outer ethical warning against prolonged estrangement and encourages the parties to restore communication and reconciliation as soon as possible. Accordingly, temporary silence used to regulate emotions must remain limited, must not be intended to harm the spouse, and must be followed by communication directed towards *iṣlāḥ*.

The findings show that the behaviour of most participants was closer to silence as a method of emotional regulation than to silent treatment as psychological punishment. The

periods of silence were generally limited, ranging from approximately 20 minutes to several hours or one to two days. Most participants also attempted to reopen communication after their emotional condition improved. Therefore, an assessment of silent treatment from the perspective of Islamic family law must consider its purpose, duration, effects, and the process following the period of silence. Temporary silence intended to prevent a more serious conflict and followed by dialogue may be understood as self-control. In contrast, silence used to punish, control, neglect, or cause emotional suffering to a spouse conflicts with *mu'āsyarah bil ma'rūf*, the spirit of *iṣlāḥ*, and the purpose of marriage in establishing a family based on *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*.

Silent Treatment, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, and Family Resilience

Silent treatment can also be analysed through the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* because family life is an important area of human welfare that must be protected. The purposes of Islamic law are not limited to formal compliance with legal norms but also include the protection of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life and psychological well-being (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage and family continuity (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). In family life, healthy communication helps preserve psychological peace, rational thinking, marital continuity, and household stability. From the perspective of *maqāṣid*, family resilience is determined not merely by the formal continuation of marriage but also by the family's ability to maintain psychological well-being, interpersonal communication, problem-solving abilities, and relational values that support a harmonious family (Qomaro, 2026).

In relation to *ḥifẓ al-naḥs*, temporary silence may serve a protective function when it prevents a person from saying or doing something that could hurt their spouse. The findings show that several participants chose to take some distance when their emotions were intense. This pattern may be understood as an effort to protect the psychological well-being of both parties. However, this protective function changes when silence continues for an extended period and causes anxiety, emotional pressure, feelings of neglect, or uncertainty. Under such circumstances, silent treatment may conflict with the protection of life and psychological well-being. The framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* places the protection of psychological well-being, intellect, and family continuity at the ethical foundation of Muslim family resilience. Therefore, every conflict-resolution strategy should be evaluated according to its effects on the welfare of family members (Faizzati, 2026).

Mala Sari's experience illustrates the emotional-regulation function of silence. She chose to remain silent for two or three hours at the beginning of an argument because she believed that anger could cause a person to say hurtful things. She explained, "When people are angry, they are unlikely to say anything good. It is better to take some distance until the anger subsides. However, our spouse is not a mind reader, so we still need to explain what we want" (M. Sari, personal communication, 22 June 2026). This statement describes two

stages of conflict resolution: calming emotions and then reopening communication. Silence was therefore not used as a substitute for dialogue but as a pause before dialogue.

Within the dimension of *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*, a communication break may provide spouses with an opportunity to control their emotions and restore their ability to think rationally. Mayu explained that she used silence to bring her thoughts and feelings into balance before responding to a conflict. She stated, “I choose to remain silent to avoid saying something or reacting excessively during an argument. By remaining silent for a while, I can usually bring my thoughts and feelings into balance so that I can respond more rationally” (Mayu, personal communication, 22 June 2026). This finding indicates that time for reflection can be part of conflict management as long as it does not become a refusal to communicate. It is consistent with the view that communication and problem-solving abilities are important elements of family resilience, particularly when families face psychological and relational pressures (Qomaro, 2026).

In relation to *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, healthy communication is necessary to maintain family continuity and stability. Marital conflict that develops into prolonged emotional distance can affect the overall functioning of the family. The findings show that most participants attempted to reopen communication after their emotions had calmed. This pattern reflects an effort to maintain family unity through emotional control, understanding the spouse’s condition, and resolving problems through dialogue. Within the *maqāṣid* framework, the protection of lineage is not limited to the biological continuation of generations. It also includes creating a stable, safe, and supportive family environment that sustains the proper functioning of the family (Faizzati, 2026).

Family resilience is also demonstrated by a couple’s ability to deal with external pressures. Work demands, parenting responsibilities, household activities, and the dynamics of urban life were found to influence the participants’ emotional conditions. Allowing temporary space when one spouse needs time to calm down may become an adaptive strategy in family life. However, this space must be accompanied by a shared understanding that communication will be reopened. The psychological and interpersonal dimensions are important because a resilient family is not one that is free from conflict but one that can manage pressure, maintain communication, and resolve problems adaptively (Qomaro, 2026). Comparable evidence from Indonesian Muslim families indicates that inappropriate social-media use may intensify domestic problems when it disrupts trust, marital interaction, and conflict resolution (Hanafi et al., 2024).

Indriani’s experience provides an example of this pattern. When a conflict intensified, she chose to stay in a different room for one or two hours. She explained, “I usually separate myself in another room for approximately one or two hours to avoid raised voices and arguments. After remaining silent, we must continue with a discussion to resolve the problem” (Indriani, personal communication, 22 June 2026). Her statement demonstrates

that family resilience does not mean the absence of conflict. Instead, it involves the spouses' ability to manage conflict constructively.

From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and family resilience, silence can produce a beneficial outcome only when it functions as a temporary pause directed towards emotional control and relationship improvement. When silence becomes a means of controlling, punishing, or ignoring a spouse, it may conflict with the protection of psychological well-being, intellect, and family continuity. The decisive factors are not simply whether silence occurs but its purpose, duration, effects, and the spouses' willingness to reopen communication. Therefore, silent treatment must be managed by balancing an individual's need for emotional space with the relational obligation to maintain communication, psychological well-being, and family unity as part of the realisation of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Faizzati, 2026).

Family resilience is closely related to the quality of interaction and the ability of family members to manage pressure adaptively. In Muslim families, family communication makes an important contribution to resilience. Islamic values also place affection, patience, communication, and the protection of family members' welfare among the essential elements for maintaining a resilient household (Al Haqiqi et al., 2024; Latifa et al., 2024; Ridlwan & Fitriana, 2024). Family resilience may also be strengthened through Islamic parenting, education, and marriage traditions that reinforce relational responsibility, shared values, and social support (Abubakar et al., 2023; Saidah et al., 2026).

Symbolic Interactionism Analysis of Silent Treatment

Symbolic interactionism explains that human actions are shaped through social interaction and the meanings attached to symbols. Within married life, communication occurs not only through words but also through facial expressions, body language, physical distance, emotional responses, and silence. Silence can therefore become a symbol with a particular meaning for both the person who remains silent and the spouse receiving that silence. Problems arise when the same symbol is interpreted differently by each party (Efendi et al., 2024).

The findings show that some participants understood silence as a symbol of their need for space, peace, and self-control. Syahputra, for example, regarded silence as a way to calm the situation when both spouses were angry. Rahmad similarly understood it as a mechanism for preventing further conflict. From the perspective of the person remaining silent, the behaviour did not represent rejection of the spouse. Instead, it was an effort to control emotions and avoid words or actions that could damage the relationship.

However, the meaning intended by the person remaining silent is not always the same as the meaning received by the spouse. This difference was clearly demonstrated in Aziz Ramadhan's experience. He regarded silence as an opportunity for self-reflection and calming his thoughts. However, he acknowledged that his spouse could become confused and attempt

to guess the meaning behind his silence. This situation shows a difference between the meaning intended by the sender of a symbol and the meaning understood by its receiver. According to symbolic interactionism, meaning is not automatically attached to an action but is formed through interpretation during social interaction.

These different interpretations may create communication uncertainty. The person who chooses silence may believe that they are preventing conflict, while a spouse who receives no explanation may interpret the behaviour as rejection, hatred, anger, punishment, or loss of affection. As a result, the emotional space intended to calm the situation may instead become a space for suspicion and negative assumptions. This condition shows that the main problem of silent treatment is not only the interruption of verbal communication but also the spouses' failure to negotiate and clarify the meaning of silence (Saidah et al., 2026).

Sri Fauziah's experience illustrates the effects of unclear meaning. She did not favour resolving conflict through silence because she believed that it could create confusion and suspicion. She explained, "I prefer to resolve problems by expressing everything that needs to be discussed and solving the problem through conversation. Communication and direct discussion allow us to examine the problem together instead of trying to resolve it through silence" (S. Fauziah, personal communication, 22 June 2026). This view demonstrates the importance of clarification so that a spouse does not independently construct a negative interpretation of silence.

The findings therefore reveal at least two primary meanings of silent treatment. First, silence may represent an emotional pause, self-control, and a need for temporary space before communication resumes. This meaning appeared among participants who remained silent only for a limited period. Second, silence may be perceived as rejection or emotional neglect when a spouse does not understand its reason or expected duration. The difference between the intended and received meanings creates the possibility of communication dysfunction.

These findings confirm that successful family communication depends not only on the intention of the person sending a message but also on the spouse's ability to understand it. Therefore, a person who needs a pause during conflict should provide at least a brief explanation that they need time to calm down and will return to discuss the problem after their emotional condition improves. Such clarification can reduce uncertainty and prevent the spouse from interpreting silence as rejection.

The perspectives of Islamic family law and symbolic interactionism meet at one important point: communication must be maintained throughout the conflict-resolution process. Islamic family law places communication within proper treatment and the effort to protect the purposes of marriage. Symbolic interactionism shows that an unclear meaning of silence can create misunderstandings and emotional distance. Among millennial families in Medan, temporary silence may still be acceptable when it is used to control emotions, is not

intended to punish a spouse, does not remove the spouse's rights, and is followed by open dialogue directed towards improving the relationship.

The framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* also allows family resilience to be understood not merely as the ability to preserve the formal marriage bond but as the ability to protect psychological well-being, family continuity, harmonious relationships, and the welfare of family members during social change (Ilyas et al., 2025; Rozikin et al., 2025).

Implications for Islamic Family Law and Family Guidance

The findings have normative implications for the development of Islamic family law because they show that silence in marital conflict cannot be classified solely according to its duration. Its legal and ethical assessment must also consider its purpose, effects on the spouse, and whether communication is subsequently reopened. Temporary silence may be regarded as a permissible conflict-management strategy when it is intended to regulate emotions, is clearly communicated, remains reasonably limited, does not neglect the spouse's rights, and is followed by dialogue and reconciliation. In contrast, prolonged silence used to punish, control, pressure, or emotionally neglect a spouse conflicts with *mu'āsarah bil-ma'rūf*, the principle of *iṣlāḥ*, and the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the protection of psychological well-being, rational judgment, and family continuity (Jalil, 2026; Pratista et al., 2025; Qomaro, 2026).

These findings provide an empirical and analytical basis for family guidance and future fatwa deliberations. Religious authorities, fatwa institutions, marriage counsellors, and family mediators may use four indicators, namely purpose, duration, effect, and the reopening of communication, to determine whether silence functions as emotional regulation or has developed into harmful withdrawal. Family guidance should recognise that spouses may require temporary emotional space during conflict while emphasising that such space must be clearly communicated, limited in duration, and directed towards reconciliation. Spouses may also be advised to agree on a period for cooling off, communicate their intention to resume discussion, and seek mediation when communication cannot be restored through direct dialogue. This study does not issue a formal fatwa; rather, it provides sociolegal evidence that may support the development of contextual family guidance and future fatwa recommendations concerning emotional withdrawal in Muslim marriages. Evidence from Indonesian marriage-guidance programmes further supports the need for sustained premarital and postmarital assistance to strengthen family resilience and prevent unresolved conflict (Djawas et al., 2022; Saleh et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that silent treatment among millennial families in Medan varies in form, purpose, duration, effects, and symbolic meaning. Most participants used temporary silence to regulate emotions, avoid harmful speech, reflect on marital conflict, and

prepare for further discussion, whereas some preferred direct communication. Silence may become dysfunctional when its duration is uncertain, its purpose shifts towards punishment or control, it causes psychological pressure, or communication is not reopened. From the perspective of Islamic family law, temporary silence may be considered acceptable when it does not violate a spouse's rights and remains directed towards *iṣlāḥ*. Conversely, prolonged punitive withdrawal is inconsistent with *mu'āsyarah bil-ma'rūf*, the obligations of spouses under the Compilation of Islamic Law, and the ideals of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, temporary emotional space may support psychological welfare, rational judgment, and family continuity. However, it loses this protective function when it produces anxiety, emotional neglect, and relational harm. Symbolic interactionism further demonstrates that silence may carry different meanings for each spouse. Therefore, intention alone is insufficient without explanation and negotiated understanding. The primary contribution of this study is a framework comprising four dimensions, namely purpose, duration, effect, and the reopening of communication, which distinguishes constructive emotional regulation from harmful punitive withdrawal. This framework has implications for Islamic family law, marital counselling, mediation, and future fatwa deliberations. Religious and family institutions may use these indicators to formulate guidance that permits temporary emotional pauses that are clearly communicated and limited in duration while preventing silence from becoming a means of punishment, psychological pressure, or neglect of marital rights. Accordingly, Muslim couples should communicate their need for temporary space, agree on its limits, and reopen dialogue through consultation and reconciliation.

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