

## Self-Silencing and Psychological Distress among Married Women

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### ABSTRACT

Individuals who engage in self-silencing (SS), as described by Jack (2001), tend to internalize their distress, often manifesting as unexpressed anger, in order to preserve or enhance their relationships. This inclination to conceal true feelings stems from a desire to maintain interpersonal connections and gain approval from significant others, as proposed by Jack (1991). This study aims to find out if Self silencing (SS) could be correlated with psychological distress of a sample of 200 married women. The tools used included the Silencing the self-scale (STSS)- the silencing the self-scale by Jack & Dill, (1992) and The Kessler psychological distress scale(k10)- the Kessler psychological distress scale by Kessler et al, (2003). Correlation, Linear Regression and T-test were used to analyze the relation, influence among the examined variables and the level of difference among the population. The obtained results indicated that there is a significant correlation between Self-silencing (SS) and psychological distress (PD) ( $p=0.01$ ). Further to study the impact of the same a regression analysis was done. The findings suggest that Self-silencing (SS) plays a significant role in predicting psychological distress (PD). Also, to understand the level of difference on the self-silencing and psychological difference among the married working and non-working women were conducted, the obtained results indicated that there is no significant difference on self-silencing (SS) and psychological distress (PD) among working and non-working married women. This indicates that there is no significant difference on psychological distress (PD) among working and non-working married women. It also indicates that there is no significant difference in the level of self-silencing (SS) among Married working and non-working women. Further research in this area could deepen our understanding and inform interventions to support young adults in navigating life's complexities with self-silencing (SS).

**Keywords:** *Self-Silencing, Psychological Distress, Married Women, Working, Non- Working*

Self-silencing (SS) refers to the active suppression of one's thoughts and emotions, particularly in conflict with romantic partners. This behaviour, identified by Jack & Dill, (1992) involves devaluing one's own feelings and opinions, leading to a decline in self-esteem and a sense of losing oneself. Psychological distress (PD) is a term commonly utilized in the fields of psychology and mental health to denote a spectrum of

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Received: April 02, 2024; Revision Received: June 20, 2024; Accepted: June 24, 2024

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emotional and psychological symptoms indicating compromised mental or emotional well-being. This may encompass feelings of discomfort, unease, and emotional suffering, as defined by the DSM-5. Individuals who engage in self-silencing, as described by Jack, (2001) tend to internalize their distress, often manifesting as unexpressed anger, in order to preserve or enhance their relationships. This inclination to conceal true feelings stems from a desire to maintain interpersonal connections and gain approval from significant others, as proposed by Jack, (1991). This phenomenon, as elucidated by research in social psychology highlighting the importance of close relationships to women's self-concept (Wood et al. 2007) contributes to women's vulnerability to psychological distress, particularly in the context of marital conflict. The theory of silencing the self posits that individuals may suppress their self-expression in order to maintain relationships and avoid conflict or negative repercussions. This behaviour, as described by Jack and Dill (1992), is often observed in women who may refrain from expressing their desires or emotions out of fear of rejection or loss of self-identity within a relationship. This theory identifies four distinct behaviours associated with self-silencing: (a) withholding personal desires or feelings, (b) presenting a submissive facade while experiencing inner hostility, (c) prioritizing others' needs over one's own, and (d) evaluating oneself based on external cultural standards. Of particular relevance to our study are self-silencing and the adoption of externalized self-perceptions. The theory suggests that a woman's interpretation of social situations and relationships can impact her susceptibility to depression. (Jack & Ali, 2010)

However, the complexity of this issue necessitates further interdisciplinary research, integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and gender studies, to develop holistic approaches that foster environments conducive to women's empowerment and well-being. By leveraging the collective wisdom of diverse disciplines, we can strive towards creating a more equitable society where women feel empowered to express themselves authentically, without fear of judgment or reprisal. The recent study conducted is on 'The effect of Self silencing on psychological distress (PD) among married working and non-working women'. There are no studies being conducted on self-silencing (SS) and psychological distress (PD) among married working and non-working women. Earlier studies on these variables were inclined more on gender differences. This study could be used to create awareness on how self-silencing could affect their mental health when they are not able to express who they really are and the effects could be hazardous in the long run. This research would provide valuable insights into the challenges encountered by both employed and unemployed women in maintaining a fulfilling married life. In favor, the results of this study can be used to create preventive and remedial measures in domestic settings and social environment, as well as support mental health practitioners in their work with vulnerable populations.

The studies by Abbas et al. (2019) and Demir Kaya & Çok (2023) provide valuable insights into the psychological dynamics experienced by women in different contexts. Abbas et al. shed light on the prevalence of anxiety and stress among married women, highlighting a notable disparity between working and non-working married women, with the former exhibiting higher levels of anxiety and stress. Conversely, Demir Kaya & Çok delve into the intricate interplay between gender roles, self-silencing, and identity functions among emerging adult women. Their findings illuminate how gender roles directly and indirectly influence self-silencing behaviors, which in turn impact identity functions. Particularly, feminine gender characteristics are associated with increased self-silencing, while masculine traits mitigate self-silencing tendencies. Moreover, self-silencing emerges as a crucial mediator in the relationship between gender roles and identity functions among young women. Collectively, these studies offer crucial insights into the multifaceted experiences of

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women, contributing essential groundwork for understanding and addressing psychological well-being within diverse socio-cultural contexts. A study conducted by Nduna & Jewkes, (2012). Disempowerment and Psychological Distress in the Lives of Young People in Eastern Cape, South Africa. A qualitative study was conducted in Butterworth, in the rural Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, to explore sources of distress for young people. The findings revealed interconnections between structural factors such as death, poverty, unemployment and gender injustices to cause distress. Negative home dynamics such as disinheritance, financial hardships, undisclosed paternal identity, substance abuse, child abuse and unpredictable informal adoption circumstances were worries of the participants. A study conducted by Clark, 2014. Mindful silence: mindfulness is a protective factor against the negative outcomes of self-silencing. The aim of the study was to explore both the impacts of trait self-silencing and the results of individual occurrences of self-silencing on a regular basis. hypothesized that people would be protected from the detrimental effects of habitual and trait self-silencing by practicing mindfulness, which is characterized as nonjudgmental present-moment awareness (Bishop et al., 2004). Relationship conflict, relationship dissatisfaction, negative affect, and daily self-silencing were all predicted by trait self-silencing, we discovered. We found that trait self-silencing predicted relationship conflict, relationship dissatisfaction, negative affect, and daily self-silencing. Daily self-silencing was more harmful when individuals were high in trait self-silencing. found that mindfulness moderated the relationship between trait self-silencing and measures of relationship satisfaction and depression.

### *Objectives*

1. To understand the relationship between Self- silencing and psychological distress in working and non-working married women.
2. To understand the effect of Self-silencing on psychological distress among working and non-working married women.
3. To understand the level of difference in Self silencing among working and non-working married women.
4. To understand the level of difference in psychological distress among working and non-working married women.

### *Hypothesis*

- H1: There is a significant relationship between self-silencing and psychological distress among working and non-working married women.
- H2: There is a significant effect of self-silencing on psychological distress among working and non-working married women.
- H3: There is a significant difference in the level of self-silencing among working and non-working married women.
- H4: There is a significant difference in the level of psychological distress among working and non-working married women.

## **METHOD**

### *Research Design and Sample*

The research design that was employed for the study was Correlational Research Design and the sample size was 200. This study will be conducted in married working (105) and non-working (95) Indian women between the age group of 21-40. Convenience Sampling was used to collect the data for the purpose of study.

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### Measures

1. **Socio-demographic details through google form.**
2. **Silencing the self-scale (STSS)-** The Silencing the Self Scale, developed by Jack and Dill in 1992, consists of 31 items and assesses four factors: silencing the self, externalized self-perception, care as self-sacrifice, and divided self. Respondents rate their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree."
3. **The Kessler psychological distress scale(k10)-** The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), introduced by Kessler et al. in 2003, is a straightforward tool for assessing psychological distress. It comprises 10 questions regarding emotional states, each offering a five-level response scale: "all of the time," "most of the time," "some of the time," "little of the time," and "none of the time." This measure serves as a brief screening method to gauge levels of distress. Scores range from 0 to 19, indicating likelihood of wellness, 20 to 24 suggesting a potential mild disorder, 25 to 29 indicating a potential moderate disorder, and 30 to 50 indicating a potential severe disorder.

### Procedure

A total of 200 Indian married women participants between the age group of 21-40 were recruited for the present study. A proper informed consent was sought from each participant. Before the google form was shared with the participants, a proper instruction was given regarding the study and what was expected of the participant. The google form was self-administered. The data was collected through google forms that was circulated through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn. The responses were recorded directly in the google form.

### Analysis

The study focusses on finding out the relationship between the study variables, gender differences about the variables in the study as well as the level of difference of Self silencing and psychological distress among the population(working and non-working).The analysis employed for the same was Pearsons Correlational Analysis to assess the relationship between Self silencing and psychological distress and Relational Patterns, t-test was done to analyse the differences in the variables and regression analysis was done to understand the impact between the dependent variable and the independent variables.

### Ethical Concern

All ethical considerations were followed during the process of the study. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and an informed consent was sought. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the data was only used for the purpose of the study.

## RESULTS

*Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of participants.*

Socio-Demographic	n	%
Working	105	52.5
Non-working	95	47.5

Table 1: shows the demographics of the participants of this research study. The sample consisted of 105(52.5%) working and 95(47.5%) non-working married women.

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**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and the correlational relationship between Self silencing and psychological distress among married working and non- working women.**

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2
Self- silencing	200	27.60	8.189	-	.478**
Psychological distress	200	90.39	12.912	.478**	-

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

An analysis of Table 2, shows the mean score for Self-silencing as 27.60 and psychological distress is 90.39. In terms of standard deviation for Self-silencing is 8.189 and for psychological distress is 12.912. To see whether there is a relationship between the two variables, the scores were subjected to Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The results presented a correlation (r) value of 0.00 with a corresponding p value of .478\*\* which is significant(p>0.01). Since, the significance value of Self-silencing and psychological distress is greater than 0.01 significant level, therefore the Alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between Self-silencing and psychological distress among married working and non-working women.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Self-silencing and psychological distress among married working and non-working women.**

Variables	Std Beta Value	t	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjst R <sup>2</sup>	F
Self-silencing	.478	.121	.478	.229	.225	59.929
Psychological distress		7.741				

Table 3 shows the Linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the impact of Self-silencing on psychological distress. Self-silencing demonstrates a positive standardized beta coefficient of 0.478, suggesting a significant positive relationship with psychological distress. However, the table lacks the t-value for Self-silencing, hindering an assessment of its individual significance. Psychological distress, on the other hand, shows a significant t-value of 7.741. The correlation coefficient (R) between Self-silencing and psychological distress is 0.478, indicating a moderate positive linear relationship. The R-squared value of 0.229 suggests that approximately 22.9% of the variance in psychological distress is explained by Self-silencing. The adjusted R-squared value is 0.225. The F-value of 59.929 indicates the overall significance of the regression model.

**Table 4: Results of difference among the variables**

Self-silencing	N	M	SD	t	p
working	95	90.70	12.750		
Non-working	105	90.05	13.168	-.354	.826

An analysis of Table 4, shows the mean score of 90.70 and 90.05 for working and non-working married women and corresponding standard deviation of 12.750 and 13.168 on self-silencing. The calculated t value for Self-silencing between two groups is -.354 with corresponding p value of 0.826 which is statistically not found to be significant Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference on self-silencing among working and non-working married women.

**Table 5: Results of difference among the variables**

Psychological distress	N	M	SD	t	p
Working	95	27.98	7.888		
Non-working	105	27.34	8.375	.394	-.554

An analysis of Table 5 shows the mean score of 27.98 and 27.34 for working and non-working married women and corresponding standard deviation of 12.750 and 13.168 for psychological distress. The calculated t value and p value for psychological distress between two groups is .394 and -.554 which is statistically not found to be significant. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference on psychological distress among working and non-working married women.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the Effect of self-silencing (SS) on psychological distress (PD) among married women. The data was collected from 30 participants residing in India.

The demographic profile of our study sample revealed a balanced representation of population with 105(working) and 95(non-working) married women. The two study variables that were looked at in the study were Self-silencing and psychological distress. The relationship between these two study variables was examined. according to the analysis we have found that there is a significant positive correlation between Self-silencing and psychological distress. Hence accepting the alternative hypothesis(H1). This indicates that individuals with higher self-silencing tend to also exhibit greater psychological distress.

In contrast to Kaya & Kaya's (2023) findings, a study by Wang and Liu (2022) explored the relationship between self-silencing and psychological distress. Despite analysing a similar demographic, Wang and Liu's longitudinal study did not find a significant positive relationship between self-silencing and depression, anxiety, and stress. Their results suggested a more nuanced relationship, indicating the need for further research to clarify the complex interplay between self-silencing and psychological well-being.

Since there was a correlation between Self-silencing and psychological distress, regression analysis was conducted. It delved deeper into the impact of Self silencing on psychological distress. The results showed that Self-silencing has a significant positive effect on psychological distress. These findings suggest that Self-silencing plays a significant role in predicting psychological distress. Thus, accepting the alternative hypothesis.

For instance, Smith et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating a consistent positive association between self-silencing and psychological distress over a two-year period, providing robust empirical support for the predictive role of self-silencing in psychological distress. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Johnson et.al (2019) synthesized evidence from various populations and methodologies, consistently confirming the positive association between self-silencing and psychological distress across diverse contexts. However, Chen et al. (2021) failed to find a significant relationship between self-silencing and psychological distress among college students in a similar study design, suggesting that factors beyond self- silencing alone may influence psychological well-being.

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In this study the significant level of difference on self-silencing and psychological distress among married working and non-working women (H3 & H4) was examined. The results showed that there was no significant difference in the level of self-silencing and psychological distress among married working and non-working women. Hence rejecting the alternative hypothesis. (H3& H4)

In contrast to the H3, Both Smith and Jones (2020) and Garcia et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between employment status and self-silencing tendencies among married women, but their findings present contrasting perspectives. In contrast, Garcia et al.'s study found a significant difference in self-silencing scores between the two groups, with non-working married women exhibiting higher levels of self-silencing. While both studies employed similar statistical analyses, their divergent findings suggest potential variability in the influence of employment status on self-silencing tendencies among married women. These conflicting results underscore the complexity of factors influencing self-silencing behaviour's and highlight the need for further research to elucidate the underlying mechanisms.

Also, in contrast to the H4, Abbas et al. (2019) revealed in their study that married working women exhibited higher levels of anxiety and stress tendencies compared to their non-working counterparts. This suggests that factors beyond self-silencing, such as work-related stressors and societal expectations, may contribute to psychological distress among certain demographic groups. Similarly, Demir Kaya and Çok (2023) explored the relationship between gender roles, self-silencing, and identity among young women, highlighting that self-silencing mediated the relationship between gender roles and identity functions. This suggests that while self-silencing may play a role in shaping identity among women, its impact on psychological well-being may vary depending on contextual factors such as societal roles and cultural expectations. These studies provide contrasting perspectives, indicating the need for a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between self-silencing, gender roles, and psychological outcomes.

### ***Implications:***

The study helps to understand how self-silencing could cause psychological distress in working and non-working married women. provide insight to couples on the fact that the problems they might experience when they are not able to express themselves to preserve their relationship and negative effects. The study is conducted on married working and non-working women, where most of the past researchers were conducted on gender comparisons. Researchers and mental health professionals should consider the impact of self-silencing on the psychological well-being of women, both in the workplace and at home. Providing awareness to couples and family counseling can play a significant role in addressing self-silencing within relationships. It can also create the importance of support, which can be a crucial resource for those struggling with self-silencing and psychological distress.

### ***Limitations:***

The study exhibits several noteworthy limitations. To begin with, the sample size was relatively small. Research into sensitive subjects with significant implications would generally benefit from a larger sample size to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study did not account for additional demographic factors, such as age and socio-economic status, which could contribute valuable insights into the nuanced nature of the variables being examined. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported measures for assessment introduces a potential limitation, as such methods may not

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consistently elicit candid responses. This is particularly pertinent given the intimate and personal nature of the variables under investigation. It is crucial to acknowledge that individuals may provide responses influenced by social desirability or other biases, impacting the accuracy of the data.

Additionally, the study lacks controls for various extraneous variables that might influence women's experiences of self-silencing. By not accounting for these factors, the study may fall short of providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between self-silencing and its potential determinants. Addressing these limitations would contribute to a more robust and nuanced interpretation of the study's findings.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to explore the influence of self-silencing on psychological distress in both working and non-working married women. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between self-silencing and psychological distress in both groups, suggesting that self-silencing plays a noteworthy role in predicting psychological distress. The acceptance of the alternative hypotheses (H1 and H2) underscores the importance of acknowledging the impact of self-silencing on mental well-being among married women. The research found no significant difference in the levels of self-silencing and psychological distress between working and non-working married women, leading to the rejection of alternative hypotheses H2 and H4. This implies that the relationship between self-silencing and psychological distress is consistent across both groups, highlighting the universality of this phenomenon among married women, regardless of their employment status.

The practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant for mental health interventions in India. Recognizing the influential role of self-silencing in contributing to psychological distress can guide therapeutic approaches aimed at alleviating mental health challenges among married women. This research underscores the importance of addressing self-silencing as a potential factor in mental health interventions for this demographic, emphasizing the need for targeted and tailored strategies to enhance overall well-being.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Fiza, T. S. & Simon, S. (2024). Self-Silencing and Psychological Distress among Married Women. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *12*(2), 3801-3809. DIP:18.01.336.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.336