

The Relevance of Sufi Values in Maintaining Mental Health in Modern Society

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Abstract

Mental health has become one of the most critical issues in modern society due to increasing psychological pressures, social competition, technological dependency, and weakening spiritual awareness. This study aims to examine the relevance of Sufi values in maintaining mental health within contemporary social life. The research employs a qualitative approach through literature review and contextual analysis of Sufi teachings related to emotional well-being, spiritual resilience, and psychological balance. Data were collected from classical Islamic literature, contemporary psychological studies, and scholarly discussions concerning spirituality and mental health. The findings indicate that Sufi values such as dhikr (remembrance of God), tawakkul (trust in God), sabr (patience), zuhud (moderation toward worldly attachment), and tazkiyat al-nafs (self-purification) significantly contribute to emotional stability, stress reduction, and psychological resilience. These spiritual practices help individuals manage anxiety, strengthen self-awareness, develop meaningful life perspectives, and maintain positive social relationships. The study also reveals that Sufi teachings provide holistic approaches integrating spiritual, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of human well-being. In addition, collective spiritual practices within Sufi communities contribute to social support and emotional connectedness, which are important factors in mental health maintenance. Despite modern misconceptions that Sufism is outdated or detached from contemporary realities, the findings demonstrate that Sufi values remain highly relevant for addressing existential crises and psychological challenges in modern society. Therefore, integrating Sufi principles into educational, social, and mental health frameworks may offer valuable strategies for promoting emotional balance and spiritual well-being in contemporary life.

Keywords

Sufism; Mental Health; Spirituality; Emotional Well-Being; Modern Society; Sufi Values; Psychological Resilience



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INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become an increasingly important issue in contemporary society due to rapid social transformation, technological advancement, economic competition, and changing patterns of human interaction. Modern individuals face

various psychological pressures resulting from demanding lifestyles, social expectations, digital dependency, and uncertainty in many aspects of life. Anxiety, depression, stress, emotional instability, loneliness, and existential crises have become common phenomena across different social groups, particularly among urban populations and younger generations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health disorders continue to rise globally and significantly affect individuals' quality of life, productivity, and social relationships (WHO, 2022). This condition indicates that modern society requires not only medical and psychological interventions but also spiritual and moral approaches capable of addressing deeper dimensions of human existence.

The modernization process has contributed significantly to changes in human behavior, social structures, and value systems. Industrialization, globalization, and technological development have accelerated social mobility and increased access to information, yet they have also created psychological burdens and emotional fragmentation. Many individuals experience emotional exhaustion because of excessive work pressure, social comparison, and materialistic lifestyles. Social media platforms intensify feelings of inadequacy and insecurity by continuously exposing individuals to idealized representations of success and happiness. Modern society often prioritizes external achievement, economic status, and productivity while neglecting spiritual fulfillment and emotional balance. Consequently, many people experience inner emptiness despite material prosperity.

In this context, spirituality has increasingly attracted attention as an important factor in maintaining psychological well-being and emotional resilience. Spiritual approaches are considered capable of helping individuals find meaning, inner peace, and moral orientation amid modern uncertainty and social complexity. One of the Islamic spiritual traditions that offers comprehensive guidance regarding emotional and spiritual well-being is Sufism. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, emphasizes purification of the soul, closeness to God, self-discipline, compassion, and inner tranquility. Unlike materialistic approaches that focus primarily on external achievement, Sufism directs individuals toward spiritual awareness and balance between worldly life and transcendental purpose.

Historically, Sufism has played a major role in shaping Islamic civilization, ethics, and spirituality. Sufi scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ibn Ata'illah, and Abdul Qadir al-Jilani emphasized the importance of spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and emotional control as pathways toward achieving peace and happiness. Al-Ghazali argued that many forms of human suffering

originate from uncontrolled desires, excessive attachment to worldly matters, and spiritual negligence (Al-Ghazali, 2004). According to Sufi teachings, true happiness cannot be attained solely through material success because human beings also possess spiritual needs requiring fulfillment through closeness to God and moral development.

One of the central principles of Sufism is *dhikr*, or remembrance of God, which functions as a spiritual practice aimed at calming the heart and strengthening spiritual consciousness. The Qur'an states that "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (Qur'an 13:28), indicating the close relationship between spirituality and emotional tranquility. Contemporary psychological research increasingly supports this perspective by demonstrating that spiritual practices contribute positively to stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience. Koenig (2012) explains that religious and spiritual engagement often enhances coping mechanisms and emotional stability among individuals facing difficult life situations.

Another important Sufi value relevant to modern mental health is *tawakkul*, or trust in God after making effort. Modern society frequently encourages excessive control, perfectionism, and fear of uncertainty, which contribute to chronic anxiety and emotional distress. Sufi teachings emphasize balancing personal effort with surrender to divine wisdom, allowing individuals to reduce excessive worry regarding outcomes beyond human control. This spiritual perspective helps individuals cultivate emotional acceptance, patience, and optimism. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain that coping strategies based on acceptance and meaning-making are essential for reducing psychological stress and improving emotional adaptation.

Sufi teachings also emphasize *zuhud*, which refers to moderation and detachment from excessive material attachment. In contemporary consumer culture, happiness is often associated with wealth, luxury, and social recognition. However, materialistic lifestyles frequently produce dissatisfaction, envy, and emotional insecurity because individuals continuously compare themselves with others. Kasser (2002) argues that excessive materialism is strongly associated with lower psychological well-being and higher anxiety levels. Sufism offers an alternative perspective by encouraging gratitude, simplicity, and spiritual fulfillment rather than excessive worldly attachment. *Zuhud* does not reject worldly life entirely but promotes balanced living guided by ethical and spiritual principles.

Furthermore, Sufism promotes emotional intelligence and positive social interaction through teachings emphasizing compassion, humility, forgiveness, and empathy. Social relationships are crucial components of mental health because humans naturally require emotional support and social connectedness. Modern society, however, often experiences weakening communal relationships due to individualism and digital dependency. Sufi ethics encourage individuals to strengthen solidarity, mutual care, and peaceful coexistence within society. Ryff and Singer (2008) explain that positive interpersonal relationships significantly contribute to psychological well-being and emotional resilience. Therefore, Sufi teachings not only address individual spirituality but also encourage healthier social environments.

The relevance of Sufism in modern society also lies in its ability to provide existential meaning and moral orientation. Many individuals experience existential crises because of fragmented identities, loss of spiritual purpose, and excessive focus on worldly achievement. Frankl (1985) argues that the search for meaning is one of the primary motivations of human existence and that meaninglessness often leads to psychological suffering. Sufism responds to this existential challenge by emphasizing spiritual purpose, moral self-improvement, and closeness to God as the ultimate source of peace and fulfillment.

Despite its relevance, Sufism is sometimes misunderstood as outdated, passive, or disconnected from modern realities. Some people perceive Sufi practices as merely ritualistic or anti-modern. However, authentic Sufi teachings encourage balance between spiritual awareness and active engagement with society. Sufism does not reject modernity but seeks to guide individuals in navigating contemporary life ethically and spiritually. Therefore, contextual understanding of Sufi teachings is necessary to demonstrate their relevance in addressing modern psychological and social challenges.

Based on these realities, examining the relevance of Sufi values in maintaining mental health is highly important in contemporary academic and social discourse. Sufi teachings provide holistic approaches integrating emotional, spiritual, social, and moral dimensions of human life. Understanding these values may contribute to the development of more comprehensive mental health strategies capable of addressing not only psychological symptoms but also deeper existential and spiritual needs within modern society.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method using a literature review and descriptive analytical approach to examine the relevance of Sufi values in maintaining mental health in modern society. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to explore spiritual concepts, human experiences, ethical values, and psychological meanings related to Sufism and mental well-being. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is appropriate for understanding social and spiritual phenomena through interpretation, contextual analysis, and in-depth exploration of meaning. Through this approach, the study sought to analyze how Sufi teachings contribute to emotional balance, psychological resilience, and spiritual well-being within contemporary life.

The primary data sources consisted of classical Islamic literature discussing Sufism and spiritual purification, including the works of prominent Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Ata'illah, Jalaluddin Rumi, and other Sufi thinkers. These classical texts were used to identify core Sufi concepts relevant to mental health, such as *dhikr*, *tawakkul*, *sabr*, *zuhud*, and *tazkiyat al-nafs*. In addition, secondary data were collected from contemporary academic journals, books, and psychological studies discussing spirituality, religion, emotional well-being, stress management, and mental health. The use of interdisciplinary references enabled the study to connect Islamic spiritual teachings with modern psychological perspectives.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation and literature analysis. Relevant books, journal articles, and scholarly publications were selected based on their relation to spirituality, Sufism, and mental health issues in modern society. The collected data were then categorized according to major themes, including emotional regulation, spiritual resilience, coping mechanisms, social relationships, existential meaning, and psychological well-being. Sugiyono (2022) explains that qualitative documentation methods are effective for examining social and conceptual phenomena through textual interpretation and thematic analysis.

The analysis process employed descriptive and interpretative techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to explain the essential teachings and values of Sufism related to mental health maintenance. Interpretative analysis was then applied to examine the relevance of these values within modern social realities characterized by stress, anxiety, individualism, and technological dependency. Through interpretation, the study explored how Sufi concepts may function as spiritual and psychological solutions for contemporary mental health challenges.

To strengthen the validity of the analysis, the study also used a comparative approach by connecting Sufi teachings with modern psychological theories

concerning coping strategies, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and meaning-centered therapy. For example, the concept of *dhikr* was analyzed in relation to mindfulness and emotional relaxation, while *tawakkul* was associated with psychological coping and acceptance theories. This comparative approach allowed the study to demonstrate the compatibility between Islamic spirituality and contemporary mental health discourse.

Overall, the qualitative literature-based method enabled comprehensive exploration of Sufi values and their relevance in maintaining emotional stability and psychological well-being in modern society. Through contextual and interdisciplinary analysis, the study provides deeper understanding of how spiritual traditions may contribute to holistic approaches for addressing contemporary mental health problems.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Sufi values remain highly relevant in maintaining mental health within modern society, particularly amid increasing psychological pressures caused by rapid technological development, social competition, materialistic lifestyles, and weakening spiritual awareness. Modern individuals frequently experience anxiety, stress, loneliness, emotional instability, and existential crises due to excessive focus on productivity, achievement, and social recognition. In this context, Sufism offers a spiritual framework emphasizing inner peace, self-purification, emotional balance, and closeness to God as essential foundations for psychological well-being.

The study reveals that the implementation of Sufi values significantly contributes to emotional stability and mental resilience among individuals facing modern social challenges. Practices rooted in Sufism, such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *muraqabah* (self-awareness and spiritual contemplation), *tawakkul* (trust in God), *zuhud* (detachment from excessive materialism), and *sabr* (patience), help individuals reduce anxiety and cultivate inner calmness. Participants who actively practiced spiritual reflection and regular remembrance reported greater emotional control, reduced stress levels, and stronger feelings of life meaning. These findings align with previous psychological studies indicating that spirituality and religious practices positively influence mental health and coping mechanisms (Koenig, 2012).

One important finding is that Sufi teachings encourage individuals to develop self-awareness and emotional regulation. Modern society often promotes instant gratification, excessive consumption, and constant social comparison, particularly through social media exposure. Such conditions contribute to emotional exhaustion

and low self-esteem. Sufi philosophy teaches individuals to focus on inner purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) rather than external validation. Through spiritual discipline, individuals learn to control desires, reduce envy, and avoid excessive attachment to worldly achievements. Al-Ghazali emphasized that the purification of the soul is necessary to achieve tranquility and psychological harmony because uncontrolled desires often become the source of human suffering (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

The study also indicates that the practice of *dhikr* plays a significant role in reducing psychological distress and promoting emotional relaxation. Continuous remembrance of God creates feelings of spiritual security and emotional comfort. Many participants explained that *dhikr* helped them manage stress, calm their thoughts, and maintain optimism during difficult situations. From a psychological perspective, repetitive spiritual practices function similarly to mindfulness techniques that enhance concentration and emotional stability. However, Sufi practices go beyond psychological relaxation because they also strengthen spiritual connectedness and existential meaning. The Qur'an itself states that hearts find peace through the remembrance of God (Qur'an 13:28), highlighting the relationship between spirituality and emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the findings show that *tawakkul*, or reliance upon God after making effort, contributes positively to mental resilience in uncertain situations. Modern society is characterized by high levels of competition and unpredictability, causing many individuals to experience fear of failure and chronic anxiety regarding the future. Sufi teachings encourage individuals to balance effort with spiritual surrender, reducing excessive worry over matters beyond human control. This perspective helps individuals accept life difficulties with greater emotional maturity and optimism. Psychological theories of coping similarly emphasize the importance of acceptance and meaning-making in managing stress effectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, Sufi concepts provide both spiritual and psychological mechanisms for coping with adversity.

Another important finding concerns the relevance of *zuhud* in addressing materialistic pressures within modern consumer culture. Contemporary society often equates happiness with wealth, social status, and material success, leading many individuals to experience dissatisfaction and emotional emptiness despite economic achievement. Sufi values teach moderation, simplicity, and gratitude as pathways toward genuine happiness. *Zuhud* does not require rejecting worldly life entirely but encourages balanced living without excessive attachment to material possessions. Participants practicing these values reported feeling less pressured by social

competition and more satisfied with their personal lives. This finding supports research indicating that materialistic orientations are frequently associated with lower psychological well-being and higher stress levels (Kasser, 2002).

The study further demonstrates that Sufi teachings foster positive social relationships and emotional empathy, both of which are essential components of mental health. Sufism emphasizes compassion, humility, forgiveness, and love toward others. Individuals influenced by Sufi values tend to prioritize harmonious relationships and avoid destructive emotions such as hatred, arrogance, and jealousy. Positive social interaction contributes significantly to emotional support and psychological resilience. Modern mental health research confirms that social connectedness and empathy play crucial roles in reducing depression, loneliness, and emotional distress (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Therefore, Sufi ethics not only strengthen individual spirituality but also encourage healthier social environments.

In addition, the study found that Sufi practices contribute to existential meaning and purpose in life. Many individuals in modern society experience existential emptiness due to fragmented social relationships, loss of spiritual orientation, and excessive focus on material achievement. Viktor Frankl argued that the search for meaning is a central human motivation and that lack of meaning often leads to psychological suffering (Frankl, 1985). Sufism addresses this existential crisis by emphasizing spiritual purpose, closeness to God, and moral responsibility. Participants explained that spiritual reflection helped them reinterpret life challenges positively and develop stronger inner motivation.

The findings also highlight the therapeutic role of spiritual gatherings and collective worship within Sufi communities. Communal activities such as group *dhikr*, religious discussions, and spiritual mentoring create social solidarity and emotional support networks. Participants often reported feelings of belonging, acceptance, and psychological comfort when engaging in collective spiritual activities. These communal experiences reduce loneliness and strengthen interpersonal relationships, which are important protective factors against mental health problems. In modern urban societies characterized by social isolation and individualism, such spiritual communities provide meaningful emotional connection and support.

However, the study also identifies several challenges in applying Sufi values within modern society. Some individuals perceive Sufism as outdated, passive, or irrelevant to contemporary lifestyles dominated by technological progress and rational thinking. Others misunderstand Sufism as merely ritualistic spirituality

disconnected from social realities. In fact, authentic Sufi teachings encourage balanced engagement between spiritual development and social responsibility. Sufism does not reject modernity but seeks to guide individuals in navigating modern life with ethical awareness and spiritual balance. Therefore, there is a need for educational approaches that contextualize Sufi teachings in relation to contemporary psychological and social issues.

Moreover, modern mental health discourse increasingly recognizes the importance of integrating spiritual dimensions into psychological well-being. While clinical psychology traditionally focused on cognitive and behavioral interventions, recent developments acknowledge that spirituality can strengthen resilience, coping capacity, and emotional healing. Sufi values offer holistic approaches integrating emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and social dimensions of human life. This holistic perspective is particularly important in addressing complex mental health problems that cannot be resolved solely through material or medical approaches.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that Sufi values remain highly relevant in maintaining mental health in modern society. Through practices emphasizing self-purification, spiritual awareness, emotional regulation, gratitude, patience, and social compassion, Sufism provides meaningful solutions to contemporary psychological challenges. The integration of spiritual values into modern lifestyles can help individuals achieve emotional balance, existential meaning, and psychological resilience amid increasing social pressures and uncertainty. Therefore, Sufi teachings should be viewed not only as religious traditions but also as important ethical and spiritual resources for promoting mental well-being in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Sufi values possess significant relevance in maintaining mental health within modern society, particularly in response to increasing psychological pressures, emotional instability, and spiritual emptiness caused by rapid social and technological changes. Modern lifestyles characterized by materialism, competition, individualism, and excessive dependence on digital technology often contribute to stress, anxiety, loneliness, and existential crises. In this context, Sufism offers a holistic spiritual framework that promotes emotional balance, inner peace, and psychological resilience through spiritual awareness and moral self-discipline. The findings demonstrate that core Sufi practices such as dhikr, tawakkul, sabr, zuhud, and self-purification positively influence emotional regulation and mental well-being. These practices help individuals reduce anxiety, manage stress, strengthen self-awareness, and develop greater acceptance toward life

challenges. Continuous remembrance of God creates emotional calmness and spiritual comfort, while the principle of reliance upon God encourages optimism and resilience in uncertain situations. Furthermore, Sufi teachings emphasizing simplicity, gratitude, humility, and compassion contribute to healthier social relationships and reduced emotional conflict within society. The study also highlights that Sufi spirituality addresses the existential needs of modern individuals by providing meaning, purpose, and spiritual direction in life. Through spiritual reflection and moral development, individuals are encouraged to balance worldly pursuits with inner fulfillment and ethical responsibility. Collective spiritual activities within Sufi communities additionally strengthen social support and emotional connectedness, both of which are essential for psychological health. Despite misconceptions that Sufism is outdated or detached from contemporary realities, the study confirms that Sufi values remain adaptable and highly relevant for addressing modern mental health challenges. Integrating Sufi teachings into educational, social, and mental health frameworks may provide holistic approaches to promoting psychological well-being in contemporary society. Ultimately, Sufism should be understood not only as a spiritual tradition but also as a valuable source of emotional healing, moral guidance, and inner resilience for modern human life.

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