

Sufism Heritage In Healthcare: The Influence Of Sufi Healing On Mental Health Development

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Abstract : Amidst the wave of modernization, Sufi healing is attracting new attention, especially regarding mental health. In 2023, IPSOS Global research considered mental health as a top concern around various health issues for 44% of respondents in 31 countries. This article explores the influence of Sufi healing on the development of mental health and its relevance today. Using a qualitative approach, the research examined multiple sources through a critical analysis literature study. The resources included Sufi texts, academic studies, and Sufi values in the history of mental health. Findings show that Sufi interventions significantly shape the development of mental health, which includes self-awareness, serenity, happiness, quality of life, spirituality, mental well-being, and holistic balance. Sufi practices offer diverse methods to address mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and trauma. With the increasing complexity of society's mental health, alternative therapies are

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becoming increasingly popular, warranting the integration of Sufi therapies as viable alternatives to mental health therapy.

Keyword: Sufism in Healthcare, Mental Health, Sufi Healing, Sufism and Psychotherapy

HOW SUFISM MEET MENTAL HEALTH AND ITS IMPACT

Historically, there is an opinion that states that Sufism comes from the word "*Shuffab*", which is a term for the prophet's companions who lived simply in the foyer of the Prophet's Mosque and devoted themselves to worship and knowledge, including: Abu Dardak, Abu Zarr, and Abu Hurairah.¹ Another opinion relies on the theory of the origin of the word *tasawwuf* on the word *shuf* which means fleece or woolen clothes. The basis of this opinion is because people who show the nature of Sufism in the early days of its development, using clothes made of wool.² From the word "*shuf*", the letter "*ya nisbal*" is then inserted so that it becomes *shufi*, whose meaning is attributed to people who wear clothes made of fleece. However, this theory is still debated, because for some cultures, woolen cloth is the clothing of the rich, while Sufism at the beginning of its emergence was synonymous with simplicity as a social protest against the Umayyad government's hedonistic and glamorous lifestyle.³

Centuries after centuries, the concept of *tasawuf* evolved broadly until 8th century of Hijriah. Whereas after 8th century, there are no more new concepts found in *tasawuf*, the rest were just the improvisation and or integration of past concepts. During those centuries of development, various scholars and their concepts graced the world of Sufism literature. Figures such as Hasan Al-Bashri, Rabiah Al-Adawiyah, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jauzy, Al-Hallaj, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, and Ibn' Arabi have made a great contributions. The emergence of

¹ Hamka. (2016). *Perkembangan dan Pemurnian Tasawuf*. Jakarta: Republika.

² Atiqah, L. (2019). *Pemaknaan Nilai Tasawuf Dalam Pemeliharaan Ekologi (Studi Fenomenologi Komunitas Argo Pathok Candi Dadi (Apc)*. IAIN Tulungagung.

³ Rakhmat, J., Madjid, N., Shahab, H., Effendi, A., Tafsir, A., Rakhmat, H., ... Bagir, H. (2000). *Kuliah-Kuliah Tasawuf (Kedua; Sukardi, Ed.)*. Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah.

concepts such as *maqamat wal abwal*, *zuhud*, *wara' dbiker & faker*, *mahabbah*, *isyq*, *insan kamil* and *wabdatul wujud* have expanded the horizons of spiritual knowledge in Sufism.^{4,5} The subjects and goals of Sufism can be summarised in the following points: 1) salvation from ignorance and attainment of gnosis (*ma'rifat*); 2) refinement and purification of the self (*tazkiyatunnafs*); 3) spiritual purging of the heart and enlightenment of the soul; 4) sincerity and dedication to the Creator (*ikhlas*) and detachment from worldliness (*zuhud*); 5) commitment to serve all of God's creations.⁶

The purpose of Sufism is to straighten the soul and control desires, which makes humans only consistent with moral nobility. However, some Sufis have a greater goal, which is to know Allah SWT, which is called *ma'rifat*.⁷ According to Khanafi, one of the goals of Sufism is to direct and guide the soul towards a clean, healthy, and perfect soul. The purpose of *tazkiyatun nafs* is to achieve different goals from tasawwuf, including the following: (1) creating the closest relationship with the Almighty (*taqarrub ila Allah*); (2) creating a mental attitude that creates a noble and wise personality (*takhalluq bi al-akaablaq al-karimah*); and (3) obtaining a firm belief in faith and Islam so that it is not affected by any situation (achievement of true knowledge) (4) achieving the path to true happiness in this world and the hereafter.⁸

William James, an American psychiatrist, said that religiosity or faith-based therapy can provide good therapeutic effects. Because someone who adopts religious values has a great tendency to be prepared to confront their problems.⁹ Sufism affects the insight of the role of spirituality in promoting well being and psychological resilience

⁴ Hamka, (2016),

⁵ Rakhmat et.al., 2000,

⁶ Ahmad, I. (2007). *The Reality of Tasawwuf in Light of the Prophetic Model*. Markazi Anjuman Khuddam ul Qur'an, Lahore.

⁷ Abu al-Wafa' al-Ghanimi al-Taftazani, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1997), 17.

⁸ Imam Khanafi al-Jauhari, *Pokok-Pokok Ajaran Tasawuf, Pekalongan: (Pekalongan: STAIN Pekalongan press, 2010), 12.*

⁹ Al Halim, A., & Mohammed, N. K. W. (2024). Sufism As Therapy Psychological Problems of Modern Society. *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, 5(1), 64-69.

among Muslims.¹⁰ Human health in every aspect affects each other. For example, the relationship between depression and decreased physical activity in adolescents can lead to feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and negative depressive thoughts.¹¹ In the realm of mental health, concepts such as self-reflection, mindfulness, spiritual well-being are increasingly recognized to be critical to overall mental health.

Tranquillity, harmony and peace of mind are signs of good mental health. This is in accordance with Amin Syukur's view of the maqāmāt of Sufism in mental therapy.¹² Mental health, also known as mental hygiene, means the avoidance of symptoms of disorder (neurose) and mental illness (psychose). According to this definition, a mentally healthy person does not have the symptoms of a disorder or mental illness.¹³ According to Sufism, spiritual emptiness, consumptive lifestyles, and individual dualism, which are increasingly common in many modern societies, are the main culprits in people experiencing psychiatric disorders and illnesses. People who experience spiritual emptiness may experience psychiatric disorders such as stress and distress. In general, medical cures are very difficult for these illnesses. Certainly inner illnesses can only be cured through a spiritual approach or Sufistic medicine.¹⁴

The morality-enhancing teachings of Sufism will encourage people to maintain their spiritual needs. In addition, the connection between feelings and spiritual experiences felt by Sufis can serve as a treatment, refresher, and cleanser of the soul for individuals. A person who has a

¹⁰ Uddin, F., & Irshad, E. (2022). Sufism, Religiosity, Life Satisfaction, Hope and Optimism: A Comparative Study of the Disciples and Non-Disciples. *International Journal of Psychological and Behavioural Research (IJPBR)*, 2(1), 1-18.

¹¹ Rahmy, H. A., & Muslimahayati, M. (2021). Depresi dan kecemasan remaja ditinjau dari perspektif kesehatan dan islam. *DEMOS: Journal of Demography, Ethnography and Social Transformation*, 1(1), 35-44.

¹² Zaduqisti Esti Pradityas Bela Yoana, Hanafi Imam, "MAQAMAT TASAWUF DAN TERAPI KESEHATAN MENTAL (STUDI PEMIKIRAN AMIN SYUKUR)," *Religia* 18, no. 2 (2015): 187.

¹³ Zakiah Darajat, *Kesehatan Mental* (Jakarta: PT. Gunung Agung, 1993), 12.

¹⁴ Amin Syukur, *Sufi Healing: Terapi Dengan Metode Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012), 37.

clean and fresh soul will definitely be able to gain mental health and mental stability, become more harmonious, and certainly maintain their mental health. Tasawwuf, through its teachings, is a therapy to overcome materialism, consumptiveism, individualism, and other deviations that cause mental disorders. Sufism offers a manifestation of mental health by helping people restore peace of mind and cleanliness of spirit.¹⁵ The integration of Sufi practices, which promote self-awareness and spiritual growth, with mental health approaches can offer individuals a holistic perspective on well-being and health¹⁶

Hence, Sufism is a type of Islamic spirituality that focuses on managing one's heart so that they can be truly focused on Allah SWT. In terms of healing illnesses, *maqāmāt* and *ahwal* can be used as basic concepts for healing various illnesses, especially those related to mental health, and can also be used as a source for healing physical illnesses. Thus, it is clear how important spiritual healing is for curing various physical and psychological illnesses. Spiritual healing can be used as part of the medical healing process in cases of physical illness.¹⁷

SUFI HEALING ON MENTAL EALLTH DEVELOPMENT

Recently, an interesting trend has emerged in the context of disease prevention and treatment in the healthcare sector. The emergence of various alternative medicine methods offers a new healing model that seems to compete with the development of the medical world. These alternative treatments are promoted through various media channels, whether oral, print or electronic. The terms used to refer to these methods vary, including herbal medicine, holistic medicine, spiritual medicine, and for those that contain Islamic spiritual elements are known as Sufi healing. Mental health encompasses more than just the absence of psychiatric conditions in an individual, it also involves possessing a well-rounded personality, holistic physical and psychological development, self-integrity, coherence of outlook,

¹⁵ Pradityas Bela Yoana, Hanafi Imam, "MAQAMAT TASAWUF DAN TERAPI KESEHATAN MENTAL (STUDI PEMIKIRAN AMIN SYUKUR)," 190.

¹⁶ Knabb, J. J. (2009). Reconsidering A. Reza Arasteh: Sufism and Psychotherapy. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 41(1), 44.

¹⁷ Syukur, *Sufi Healing; Terapi Dengan Metode Tasawuf*, 45.

resilience to stress, self-sufficiency, an accurate perception of reality, empathy, social sensitivity, and the capacity to adapt and harmonize with one's environment. From the Sufistic perspective, mental health is rooted in faith and piety, aiming to realize a meaningful existence marked by happiness both in this life and the hereafter.¹⁸

It is widely recognized that the self comprises various components. Al-Ghazali provides an analogy to understand the focus of Sufi healing and its impact on mental health. He likens a human being to a kingdom, where the soul serves as the king, the body as the territory, the senses and other limbs as the armies, the mind as the vizier, and lust and anger as the police force. The king (soul) and the vizier (mind) strive to guide individuals towards a righteous and God-blessed path, whereas lust and anger attempt to lead them astray towards impiety and wrath. For achieving tranquility and happiness within the human kingdom, the authority of the king and vizier must surpass that of lust and anger. If the latter prevails, the kingdom faces collapse and destruction. In Al-Ghazali's view, the body acts merely as an instrument for the soul, with the soul being eternal (baqa) while the body is transient (mortal).¹⁹ There is no doubt that the self is made up of many elements. Al-Gahzali's analogy can be used to discover what aspects Sufi healing focuses on and how it affects mental health.

Al-Ghazali's analogy, when applied to various Sufi healing practices, demonstrates the formation of natural essence and the process of spiritual purification underlying these methods. Principles such as mujahadah (striving), riyadhah (spiritual exercise), and tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) are emphasized as effective means to achieve mental well-being and overall mental health. Sufi interventions offer therapeutic approaches that incorporate spiritual practices to improve psychological well-being among Muslims, bridging the gap between traditional teachings and contemporary mental health practices. This integration fosters a holistic approach to

¹⁸ Hasan, A. B. P., & Tamam, A. M. (2018). The implementation of mental health concept by Imam Al-Ghazali in Islamic counseling guidance. *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*, 1(1), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

wellness, addressing both spiritual and psychological dimensions, as religiousness is linked to life satisfaction, hope, and optimism.²⁰

The overarching aim of applying Sufi principles is to foster happiness, tranquility, and prevention of psychological disorders. Achieving this requires the individual to internalize the concepts of maqamat (spiritual stations) and ahwal (spiritual states) in the treatment or self-improvement process, aiding in the observation and guidance of their spiritual and personal development. The maqamat and ahwal include practices like dhikr (remembrance of God), which calms thoughts and feelings, and mujahadah, which involves the struggle to control one's desires and avoid complacency. In Sufism, mujahadah refers to the disciplined effort to restrain one's passions and avoid indulgence in transient pleasures. Wara' entails self-discipline and abstinence, promoting restraint. Zuhud involves detaching oneself from excesses, whether in positive or negative feelings. Qana'ah, or contentment, serves as an alternative self-therapy for psychological disorders that often lead to adverse outcomes, as it nurtures an attitude of acceptance and self-respect toward reality. The cultivation of awareness, personality, and mental integrity are among the positive impacts of sincere surrender to Allah. Collectively, these principles function as Islamic psychotherapies with preventive, curative, and constructive roles, aimed at achieving measurable mental health and a balanced personality.²¹

There is one Sufi scholar who has contributed Sufi healing to the world of holistic health, not just mental health. This knowledge is summarised in a book entitled "The Book of Sufi Healing". In it, Sheikh Chishti explains various concepts and practices of Sufi healing, ranging from concepts to applicable therapies. It is explained that the level of the human soul and spiritual depth have different levels or types of mental illness. In fact, diseases that can arise from conditions in certain souls are not only psychological but can also be physical

²⁰ Hasan, A. B. P., & Tamam, A. M. (2018). The implementation of mental health concept by Imam Al-Ghazali in Islamic counseling guidance. *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*, 1(1), 1.

²¹ Al Halim, A., & Mohammed, N. K. W. (2024). Sufism As Therapy Psychological Problems of Modern Society. *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, 5(1), 64-69.

diseases. Sheikh Chishti presented various solutions to health problems, especially psychological ones, through various methods that can be adjusted according to each preference. Some of them include the recommendation to adjust the diet as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SaW., fasting, dhikr, prayer, and the use of herbal medicine.²²

Signs of robust mental health include tranquility, harmony, and peace of mind, aligning with Amin Shukur's perspective on the *maqāmāt* (spiritual stages) in Sufi mental therapy.²³ Mental health, often referred to as mental hygiene, involves the absence of symptoms associated with disorders such as neurosis and illnesses such as psychosis. Therefore, an individual with good mental health is characterized by the lack of symptoms indicative of such psychological conditions.²⁴ According to Sufi teachings, spiritual emptiness, materialistic lifestyles, and the prevalence of dualistic thinking in contemporary society are primary contributors to various human disorders and mental illnesses. Individuals suffering from a lack of spiritual fulfillment often encounter psychiatric issues such as stress and distress, which are typically resistant to conventional medical treatments. These inner ailments, therefore, require a spiritual or Sufi-based approach for effective healing.²⁵

The ethical teachings of Sufism play a crucial role in fulfilling individuals' spiritual needs. Additionally, the profound connection between emotional states and spiritual experiences that Sufis undergo can act as a therapeutic tool, refreshing and purifying the soul. An individual with a purified and revitalized soul is likely to achieve mental stability and harmony, thereby sustaining mental health. Tasawwuf functions as a form of therapy, addressing materialism, consumerism, individualism, and other deviations that contribute to mental disorders.

²² The book of sufi healing Chishti, Moinuddin Hakim. (2017). *Penyembuhan Cara Sufi*. Yogyakarta: Narasi. p.39-65

²³ Zaduqisti Esti Pradityas Bela Yoana, Hanafi Imam, "MAQAMAT TASAWUF DAN TERAPI KESEHATAN MENTAL (STUDI PEMIKIRAN AMIN SYUKUR)," *Religia* 18, no. 2 (2015): 187.

²⁴ Zakiah Darajat, *Kesehatan Mental* (Jakarta: PT. Gunung Agung, 1993), 12.

²⁵ Amin Syukur, *Sufi Healing: Terapi Dengan Metode Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012), 37.

By facilitating the restoration of inner peace and spiritual clarity, Sufism provides a pathway to achieving genuine mental well-being.²⁶

One of the aims of Sufism is to purify the soul and regulate desires, aligning individuals with ethical excellence. Nonetheless, certain Sufis pursue a higher objective, termed *ma'rifatullah*, which involves seeking intimate knowledge and awareness of Allah SWT.²⁷ According to Khanafi, one of the primary objectives of Sufism is to guide the soul towards purity, health, and perfection. *Tazkiyatun nufus* aims to accomplish various goals within Sufism, which include: (1) seeking nearness to the Divine (*taqarrub ila Allah*); (2) cultivating a mindset that fosters noble and wise character traits (*takhalluq bi al-akhlaq al-karimah*); (3) attaining steadfast faith in Islam that remains unshaken regardless of circumstances (attainment of true knowledge); and (4) achieving genuine happiness in both worldly life and the hereafter.²⁸

Therefore, Sufism represents a form of Islamic spiritual practice centered on purifying the heart to achieve a profound connection with Allah SWT. Regarding the treatment of ailments, *maqāmāt* and *ahwal* serve as fundamental principles for addressing diverse illnesses, particularly those affecting mental health, and also offer potential remedies for physical ailments. This underscores the significant role of spiritual healing in treating a wide array of physical and psychological disorders, suggesting its integration into medical approaches for physical conditions.²⁹

CONCLUSION

The Sufi tradition offers a holistic approach to mental health. It incorporates spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions to help

²⁶ Pradityas Bela Yoana, Hanafi Imam, "MAQAMAT TASAWUF DAN TERAPI KESEHATAN MENTAL (STUDI PEMIKIRAN AMIN SYUKUR)," 190.

²⁷ Abu al-Wafa' al-Ghanimi al-Taftazani, *Sufi Dari Zaman Ke Zaman* (Bandung: Pustaka, 1997), 17.

²⁸ Imam Khanafi al-Jauhari, *Pokok-Pokok Ajaran Tasawuf, Pekalongan:* (Pekalongan: STAIN Pekalongan press, 2010), 12.

²⁹ Syukur, *Sufi Healing; Terapi Dengan Metode Tasawuf*, 45.

individuals achieve mental well-being. Sufi practices such as dhikr, meditation and contemplation can help reduce stress, anxiety and depression. They can also increase mindfulness, self-awareness, and self-acceptance. Sufi healing practices, such as spiritual counselling and guidance, can provide individuals with a sense of support, understanding, and connection. This can be particularly beneficial for those who are struggling with mental health challenges. Sufi traditions have the potential to be a valuable resource in mental health care. They can be integrated with conventional approaches to provide more comprehensive and holistic care. This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between Sufi traditions and mental health. The findings of this study can be used to develop more effective programmes and interventions to promote mental health.

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