

Sufi meditation and mental health: a phenomenological study of spiritual practices in the Naqshbandi Haqqani order

M. Agus Wahyudi

UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia

UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia

E-mail: agus.wahyudi@staff.uinsaid.ac.id

Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin

UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia

E-mail: sehatihsan@ar-raniry.ac.id

Eka Srimulyani

UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Email: ekasrimulyani@ar-raniry@ac.id

M. Ikhwan

STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh, Indonesia

E-mail: m.ikhwan@staindirundeng.ac.id

Waryunah Irmawati

UIN Salatiga, Indonesia

E-mail: waryunahirmawati@uinsalatiga.ac.id

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, focusing on Sufi meditation practices and their influence on mental health. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological design, data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving three adolescents engaged in Sufi meditation in Klaten, Indonesia. The study reveal that three core practices—*dhikr* (remembrance of God), *muraqabah* (spiritual mindfulness), and *muhasabah* (self-reflection)—play a pivotal role in fostering mental well-being. These practices promote emotional regulation, inner peace, catharsis, and resilience, thereby integrating spiritual and psychological dimensions of health. *Dhikr* and *muraqabah* deepen spiritual connectedness and renew a sense of meaning in life, while *muhasabah* facilitates cognitive restructuring and enhances self-awareness. Collectively, these elements contribute to sustained psychological stability and improved life satisfaction. The study underscores that Sufi meditation within the Naqshbandi Haqqani tradition not only enriches spiritual life but also serves as a culturally grounded and effective psychological intervention, offering valuable implications for incorporating faith-based approaches into contemporary mental health promotion.

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman subjektif para pengikut Tarekat Naqshbandi Haqqani, dengan fokus pada praktik meditasi sufi dan dampaknya terhadap kesehatan mental. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi terhadap tiga remaja yang mengikuti praktik meditasi sufi di Klaten, Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tiga praktik inti—zikir (mengingat Allah), muraqabah (kesadaran spiritual), dan muhasabah (refleksi diri)—memegang peran sentral dalam membentuk kesehatan mental. Praktik-praktik ini menumbuhkan kontrol emosi, kedamaian batin, katarsis, dan resiliensi, sehingga mencerminkan integrasi antara kesehatan spiritual dan psikologis. Zikir dan muraqabah memfasilitasi hubungan spiritual yang lebih mendalam serta pembaruan makna hidup, sedangkan muhasabah mendorong restrukturisasi kognitif dan peningkatan kesadaran diri. Secara keseluruhan, elemen-elemen ini berkontribusi pada stabilitas psikologis yang berkelanjutan dan peningkatan kepuasan hidup. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meditasi sufi dalam tradisi Naqshbandi Haqqani tidak hanya memperkaya kehidupan spiritual, tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai intervensi psikologis berbasis budaya yang

efektif, sekaligus menawarkan wawasan penting bagi integrasi pendekatan berbasis iman dalam kesehatan mental.

Keywords: *Mental health; Sufi meditation; Spiritual; Naqshbandi Haqqani*

Introduction

Mental health is a multidimensional construct encompassing psychological, biological, social, moral, and spiritual well-being.¹ According to the World Health Organization, the Covid-19 pandemic has led a 25% global increase in mental health disorders, particularly anxiety and depression.² In Indonesia, the pandemic has exacerbated various psychological challenges, including heightened stress, social isolation, familial conflict and, in severe cases, major depressive episodes accompanied by suicidal ideation.³ Amid rapid technological advances, economic fluctuations, and shifting cultural dynamics, Indonesian society faces increasingly complex factors that exert a profound influence on mental health. These realities underscore the urgency of adopting a comprehensive, integrative approach to mental health in order to foster resilience and sustain holistic societal well-being.

Data from the 2022 Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS)⁴ indicate that one in three adolescents experienced mental health difficulties within a 12-month period, while one in twenty

¹S Haque Nizamie, Mohammad Zia Ul Haq Katshu, and N A Uvais, "Erratum: Sufism and Mental Health", *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 62, no. 8 (2020), S324.

²Dian-Jeng Li et al., "Fatores Relacionados à Covid-19 Associados a Distúrbios Do Sono e Pensamentos Suicidas Entre o Público Taiwanês: Uma Pesquisa No Facebook", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 17, no. 12 (2020), 1–12.

³Shuhei Nomura et al., "Trends in Suicide in Japan by Gender during the COVID-19 Pandemic, up to September 2020", *Psychiatry Research*, Vol. 295 (2021), 113622.

⁴The I-NAMHS (*Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey*) is a nationally scaled household survey developed and conducted through a collaboration between the Reproductive Health Center at Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia and the University of Queensland in Australia as the global coordinator, with support from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the United States. Indonesia is one of three countries participating in a similar project under the NAMHS initiative, led by the University of Queensland in Australia.

received a clinical diagnosis of a mental disorder.⁵ These prevalence rates equate to approximately 13 million adolescents facing mental health challenges and 2 million living with diagnosable conditions. Such problems—manifesting through disturbances in cognition, emotion, and mood—can result in substantial functional impairment and diminished quality of life.⁶ One critical determinant of the rising burden of mental disorders is the limited availability and accessibility of mental health services. According to Articles 8 and 9 of Indonesian Law No. 18 of 2014 on Mental Health, preventive and promotive interventions may be implemented by multiple stakeholders, including families, community-based organizations, and faith-based institutions. Consequently, religious traditions, spiritual values, ritual worship, and the social capital embedded within religious communities can serve as vital, culturally grounded resources for strengthening mental health promotion and prevention efforts.⁷

Among various approaches and services aimed at improving mental health, spiritual practices such as Sufism have gained increasing attention as a potential alternative therapeutic method.⁸ Sufism, as the spiritual dimension of Islam, emphasizes the pursuit of closeness to God through practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *muraqabah* (self-vigilance), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *suluk* (spiritual journey), *uzlah* (isolation

⁵Center for Reproductive Health, University of Queensland, & Johns Bloomberg Hopkins School of Public Health, Indonesia – National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS), *Laporan Penelitian*. Pusat Kesehatan Reproduksi, 2022.

⁶Raghu Raghavan et al., “Multiple Mental Health Literacies in a Traditional Temple Site in Kerala: The Intersection Between Beliefs, Spiritual and Healing Regimes”, *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 47, no. 3 (2023), 743–765.

⁷Prakash B. Behere et al., “Religion and Mental Health”, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 55, no. 1 (2013), 187–194.

⁸Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy et al., “Spiritual Healing: A Study of Modern Sufi Reflexology Therapy in Indonesia”, *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (2022), 187–208.

for devotion), and other forms of spiritual discipline.⁹ In Indonesia, Sufism manifests in the form of *tariqa* (Sufi order), which teaches and practices these spiritual methods, making it a vital component of religious tradition.¹⁰ *Tariqa* (Sufi order) itself represents a holistic system of Sufi education, addressing not only spiritual dimensions but also providing solutions to various life challenges.¹¹ Today, tarekat serves not only as a medium for spiritual cultivation but also as an alternative support system for its followers in facing life's challenges, including financial, social,¹² physical health,¹³ and particularly mental health issues.¹⁴

Several previous studies have explored themes related to *tariqa*, Sufi practices, and mental health. Izzatunissa found that the teachings of *maqamat* (station) in Sufism can contribute to improving an individual's mental health.¹⁵ Husniati stated that the *maqamat* of *taubat* (repentance) in Sufism encourages individuals to engage in positive actions, which, in turn, supports the achievement of mental well-being.¹⁶ Previous studies have recommended

⁹S. Maryam Yusuf, "Inter-Subjectivity of Khalwat (Suluk) Members in the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Ponorogo", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2020), 103-126.

¹⁰Martin Van Bruinessen and Julia D. Howell, *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, Sydney: Western Sydney University, 2007.

¹¹Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning Pesantren Dan Tarekat*, Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012.

¹²Tahmina Iqbal and Mazhar Farid, "Sufi Practices as the Cause of Spiritual, Mental and Physical Healing at Chishti Shrines in Pakistan", *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, Vol. 20, no. 10 (2017), 943-953.

¹³Ihsan Kamaludin and Maya Najihatul Ula, "Sufism Healing Method for Drugs Rehabilitation: A Case Study in Pp. Suryalaya Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia", *Ulumuna*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (2019), 384-401.

¹⁴Ahmad Saifuddin, "The Elaboration of Sufism Value and Psychology To Improve Mental Health in Facing Pandemics", *Psikis : Jurnal Psikologi Islami*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (2022), 277-289.

¹⁵Jarman Arroisi, Rohmah Akhirul Mukharom, and Maulida 'Izzatul Amin, "Sufistic Phycoteraphy; Telaah Metode Psikoterapi Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah", *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (2021), 253-278.

¹⁶Reva Husniati, Cucu Setiawan, and Dian Siti Nurjanah, "Relevansi Taubat Dengan Kesehatan Mental Dalam Islam", *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2023), 93-119.

exploring spiritual values, particularly those rooted in Sufi teachings, as a means to discover and deepen one's sense of life meaning.¹⁷ In the context of *tariqa*, studies have shown that the role of the *mursyid* (spiritual guide) significantly contributes to enhancing the inner peace of *tariqa* followers.¹⁸ Additionally, the practice of *khalwat* (spiritual retreat) within Sufi orders has been found to foster intersubjectivity among participants, as they are able to explore inner experiences and understanding of reality.¹⁹

Based on these results, Sufi practices can serve as an effective alternative for providing mental health services,²⁰ as shown by previous studies that often position them as therapeutic media for addressing and healing mental disorders.^{21,22} Additionally, some studies have specifically examined Sufi meditation through literature reviews.^{23,24} Sufi meditation has been shown to reduce stress levels among university students and help them become more focused, confident, and optimistic.²⁵ However, research specifically exploring the experiences of *Sufi order* followers and their impact on mental health remains limited. This study aims to explore the

¹⁷Tenneson Boatsi and Veronica Dwarika, "Spirituality and Transcendental Meditation Practitioners' Experiences in South Africa and Ghana", *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2025), 377-400.

¹⁸Nurul Qomariyyah and Ahmad Saifuddin, "Tārīqa Followers and Inner Peace: A Phenomenological Study of Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya Order in Indonesia", *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2022), 1-22.

¹⁹Yusuf, "Inter-Subjectivity of Khalwat (Suluk) Members..."

²⁰H Chaer, A Sirulhaq, and A Rasyad, "Zikir Hening Sufi Dalam Analisis Semiotik", *Syifa al-Qulub: Jurnal Studi Psikoterapi Sufistik*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (2020), 49-60.

²¹Wenda Asmita and Irman Irman, "Aplikasi Teknik Zikir Dalam Konseling Terhadap Kesehatan Mental", *Al-Ittizaan: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Islam*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2022), 80-85.

²²Islamy et al., "Spiritual Healing..."

²³Abdullah Mubarak and Siti Rohmah, *Meditasi Sufistik Pada Tarikat Naqsyabandiyah Haqqani*, Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia press, 2007.

²⁴Salahuddin Sopus, "Mengenalkan Meditasi Sufistik Ke Dunia Pendidikan", *Lentera Pendidikan : Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (2017), 31-40.

²⁵Zalfa Nafisa Ahmad et al., "Pengaruh Meditasi Sufi Terhadap Tingkat Stres Pada Mahasiswa Jurusan Tasawuf Dan Psikoterapi", *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (2024), 52-66.

experiences of followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, with a focus on Sufi meditation. The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, founded by Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani, is a transnational Sufi order known for its innovative approach,²⁶ notably through the use of digital platforms to disseminate its teachings globally.²⁷ In Indonesia, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order has numerous followers distributed across multiple affiliated *zawiyahs*.²⁸ One of these is the Darul Afkar Islamic Boarding School in Klaten, Central Java, which actively practices Sufi meditation.

This study adopts a qualitative design employing a phenomenological method to explore individuals' lived experiences.^{29,30} Specifically, it seeks to examine the subjective experiences of followers of Sufi meditation within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. The participants included three male adolescents who met the following criteria: (1) active engagement in the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order Sufi meditation practices; (2) a minimum of three years of continuous participation; and (3) voluntary consent to take part in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation review. The analytical procedure involved a systematic examination of interview transcripts, thematic identification based on participants' interpreted experiences, followed by an in-depth interpretation of these themes in relation to mental health dimensions.

²⁶Jorgen S Nielsen, Mustafa Draper, and Galina Yemelianova, "Transnational Sufism: The Haqqaniyya," in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006, 103–114.

²⁷Ziaulhaq Hidayat, "Transformasi Sufism Into Digital Media: Eshaykh and Simplification of Tarekat Orthodoxy", *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (2022), 197–223.

²⁸Gazali, *Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani Di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2015.

²⁹John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Sage Publications, Inc, 2007.

³⁰Lucy Tindall, "J. A. Smith, P. Flower and M. Larkin, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (2009): 346–347.

Sufi meditation: an innovation in the Naqshbandi Haqqani order

In Islamic tradition, various Sufi orders have evolved uniquely across different regions.³¹ A branch of the Naqshbandi order, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, is renowned for its adaptability to modernity and its global presence.³² This order is led by Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani, a pivotal figure who played a significant role in shaping the direction and identity of the order in the 20th century.³³ In established Sufi traditions, spiritual education is centered on an intensive relationship between the disciple and the *mursyid* (spiritual guide), facilitated through core practices such as *bai'at* (initiation), *dhikr*, *wirid* (recitations), Islamic meditation, *muraqabah*, and *suluk* (spiritual journeying).³⁴ These practices are traditionally conducted in a *zawiya*, a dedicated space for the exclusive study of the order's teachings.³⁵ However, the Naqshbandi Haqqani order has shown innovation through digital technology to reach a wider audience, thereby making its approach more inclusive and accessible.³⁶

One of the innovations of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order is Sufi meditation, a spiritual discipline combining Sufi values with meditation

³¹Martin Van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Di Indonesia*, Bandung: Mizan, 1996); Abubakar Aceh, *Pengantar Ilmu Tarekat: Uraian Tentang Mistik*, Solo: Ramdhani, 1985.

³²David W. Damrel, "Aspects of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order in North America", in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel, New York: Routledge, 2006, 115–126; M Milani and A Possamai, "Sufism, Spirituality and Consumerism: The Case Study of the Nimatullahiya and Naqshbandiya Sufi Orders in Australia", *Contemporary Islam*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2016), 67–85.

³³Wahyu Nugroho, "Sufism and Interreligious Dialogue: The Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order in Indonesia", *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2021), 111–126; Simon Stjernholm, "What Is the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Tariqa? Notes on Developments and a Critique of Typologies," in *Sufism in Britain*, 2013, 197–211.

³⁴Daniel Křifžek, "Dhikr by Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya: Context and Structure of the Ritual", *Religio*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (2011), 201–222.

³⁵Alimova Mahfuza, "The Relationship between Pir and Murid in Sufism", *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research (AJMR)*, Vol. 9, no. 10 (2020), 2278–4853.

³⁶William Rory Dickson, "An American Sufism: The Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order as a Public Religion", *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Vol. 43, no. 3 (2014), 411–424.

techniques to achieve inner peace, self-awareness, and a deeper connection with God.³⁷ Sufi meditation in this order takes the form of *muraqabah*, a state of awareness of being under God's watch.³⁸ Generally, meditation aims to enhance mindfulness, tranquility, and focus through techniques such as relaxed sitting postures, breath control, and mental discipline.³⁹ This practice benefits physical, mental, and spiritual health, including reducing stress,⁴⁰ improving concentration, and managing emotions.⁴¹ The Sufi meditation program consists of four components, which include sitting posture (cross-legged), *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah*.

Transformative role of meditation in enhancing mental health

The findings of this study indicate that the experiences of Sufi meditation practitioners strongly influence their mental health, across psychological, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. The first theme concerns the experience of Sufi meditation among followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. Within this theme, participants described two key aspects: (1) attaining spiritual closeness to God, and (2) discovering the meaning of life through sustained spiritual practice. These experiences often involve heightened self-awareness, a deeper appreciation of the Divine presence,

³⁷Naan Naan and Siti Aisyah, "Sufistic Meditation as a Form of Happiness Transformation," *el Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 25, no. 1 (2023): 137–155.

³⁸Mubarak and Rohmah, "Meditasi Sufistik..."

³⁹Marco Sperduti et al., "Méditer Pour Bien Vieillir ? Les Possibles Bienfaits Des Pratiques Méditatives Sur Le Déclin Cognitif Lié à l'âge," *Gériatrie et Psychologie Neuropsychiatrie du Vieillessement*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (2017): 205–213; Naan and Aisyah, "Sufistic Meditation..."

⁴⁰Chuntana Reangsing, Tanapa Rittiwong, and Joanne Kraenzle Schneider, "Effects of Mindfulness Meditation Interventions on Depression in Older Adults: A Meta-Analysis", *Aging & Mental Health*, Vol.25, no. 7 (2021), 1181–1190.

⁴¹Stacey Hatch et al., "The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Meditation Treatments for Late Life Anxiety: A Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials", *Aging & Mental Health*, Vol. 27, no. 6 (2023), 1045–1055; Samta P Pandya, "Meditation Program Mitigates Loneliness and Promotes Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction and Contentment among Retired Older Adults: A Two-Year Follow-up Study in Four South Asian Cities", *Aging & Mental Health*, Vol. 25, no. 2 (2021), 286–298.

and a more purposeful and meaningful orientation toward life.

The second theme relates to the impact of meditation on mental health. Three interrelated sub-themes emerged: (1) *muraqabah* as a means of self-control, (2) the attainment of inner peace through consistent *muraqabah* practice, and (3) *muhasabah* as a process of cognitive restructuring. These practices not only foster emotional stability and stress management but also help transform negative thoughts into more constructive ones (table 1).

Table 1. main themes and sub-ordinate themes

Main Theme	Sub-ordinate Themes
The experience of Sufi meditation among followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order	1. Attaining spiritual closeness to God 2. Attaining the meaning of life through spiritual practices
The impact of meditation on mental health	1. <i>Muraqabah</i> as a path to self-control 2. Attaining inner peace through <i>muraqabah</i> 3. <i>Muhasabah</i> as cognitive restructuring

Attaining spiritual closeness to God

The research findings indicate that the Sufi meditation program within the Naqshbandi Haqqani order, particularly through techniques such as *dhikr* and *muraqabah*, helps strengthen spiritual closeness to God. This connection is seen in heightened awareness of God’s presence, prompting individuals to live in accordance with His will.^{42,43} The participants

⁴²Sufyan Anwar et al., “The Dhikr and the Mental Health of the Elderly in Aceh, Indonesia”, *Health SA = SA Gesondheid*, Vol. 29 (2024), 2456.

⁴³Maulana Abi Khatfah, “Kebahagiaan Dalam Pandangan Imam Al-Ghazali Dan Thomas Aquinas: Perbandingan Spiritual Dan Filosofis”, *Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Sosial Keagamaan*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (2024), 192-205.

involved in this study reported experiencing a more intimate and profound relationship with God, which not only enriched their spiritual experience but also brought a deep sense of inner peace. Informant P1 reported that through the practices of *dhikr* and *muraqabah*, they experienced an enhanced spiritual closeness to God, along with a deeper understanding and appreciation of His presence in all aspects of life.

“When I sit in *dhikr* and practice *muraqabah*, it feels as if my heart is drawn very close to Allah. It is as though, in every moment and in whatever I do, there is an awareness that Allah is present and watching. In the past, I was often heedless, but now, through this practice, my heart feels calmer and life seems to have a clearer direction.” (P1/SRD, 27)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Informant P2, who reported a strong spiritual connection with God, which ultimately led to feelings of tranquility, sincerity, and profound gratitude.

“When I engage in *dhikr* and *muraqabah*, I feel as though God is so near, present in every breath and every step I take. There is a sense of calm, sincerity, and gratitude that is difficult to put into words, yet I clearly feel an inner peace.” (P2/FRP, 28)

However, Informant P3 shared a slightly different experience. They felt anxiety and guilt when recalling God, due to reflections on past mistakes and sins. Nevertheless, they responded positively to this condition by increasing their efforts to draw closer to God through the Sufi meditation program. This process ultimately led them to a state of inner peace, which in turn strengthened their spiritual commitment.

“At first, whenever I remembered God, I felt anxious and guilty because I was reminded of my past sins. However, through *dhikr* and *muraqabah*, I learned not to dwell in that guilt. Instead, I turned it into a motivation to draw closer to Him, until eventually my heart felt at peace and my faith grew stronger.” (P3/MB, 27)

The study findings show that the practices of *dhikr* and *muraqabah*

within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order not only strengthen one's spiritual connection with God but also contribute to enhancing inner peace, self-awareness, and emotional resilience. These findings align with classical and contemporary scholarship that conceptualizes spiritual practice as a catalyst for psychological and moral transformation. Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasizes that dhikr and *muraqabah* serve as processes of purifying the heart (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), guiding a servant toward the realization of divine knowledge (*ma'rifatullah*).⁴⁴ These results also align with previous studies demonstrating that engagement in intensive religious rituals can enhance spiritual well-being, reduce stress, and foster positive emotion.⁴⁵

However, this study reveals an underexplored dimension of experience—specifically, the shift from *religious guilt* to *spiritual empowerment*, as experienced by Informant P3. This transformative process demonstrates that religious guilt, when addressed through structured religious rituals, can become a positive source of energy to strengthen spiritual commitment.⁴⁶ Furthermore, this research addresses two key gaps in the literature. First, most studies on meditation and mental health remain focused on mindfulness-based practices,⁴⁷ while research on Sufi-based meditation, particularly within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, is still very limited. Second, existing studies tend to situate *tariqa* practices within theological or historical frameworks,⁴⁸ rather than viewing them as culturally

⁴⁴Nur Cholis and Syahril, "Konsep Tasawuf Sebagai Psikoterapi Bagi Problematika Masyarakat Modern (Study Terhadap Kitab Ihya' 'Ulumiddin Karya Imam Al-Ghazali)", *Manthiq*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2018), 43–58.

⁴⁵Harold G Koenig and Saad Saleh Al Shohaib, "Religiosity and Mental Health in Islam", in *Islamophobia and Psychiatry: Recognition, Prevention, and Treatment*, United States: Springer, 2019, 55–65.

⁴⁶Samuel R Weber and Kenneth I Pargament, "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health", *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, Vol. 27, no. 5 (2014), 358–363.

⁴⁷Naan and Aisyah, "Sufistic Meditation...; Reangsing, Ritti Wong, and Schneider, "Effects of Mindfulness Meditation...

⁴⁸Francesco Piraino, "Chapitre 6. La Naqshbandiyya-Ḥaqqāniyya", in *Le soufisme en Europe, Maghreb Contemporain*, Paris: Karthala, 2024, 235–302; Arif Rahmat Triasa, "Tarekat

and religiously grounded psychotherapeutic interventions with direct implications for the mental health of contemporary Muslim communities.

Attaining the meaning of life

The research findings indicate that Sufi meditation plays a crucial role in helping individuals attain a deeper and more purposeful sense of life. The meaning of life refers to the purpose, values, or significance that an individual assigns to their existence, which is often influenced by personal beliefs, culture, and life experiences.⁴⁹ Based on interviews with informants, P3 reported that through the routine of Sufi meditation, they were able to gain a clearer understanding of their life's purpose. These practices provided them with deeper insights into the meaning of life in line with their spiritual values.

“Since regularly engaging in the practices of dhikr and muraqabah, I have gained a clearer understanding of the direction of my life. It feels as though I have been guided toward realizing the purpose of my existence in this world and how I should live in alignment with the spiritual values I hold.” (P3, MB, 27)

Informant P1 stated that Sufi meditation had enabled him to face life's challenges with greater confidence, grounded in the understanding that every event—whether favorable or difficult—carries meaning and purpose within God's divine plan. Similarly, Informant P2 reported that participation in the Sufi meditation program fostered a more positive outlook on life, leading him to recognize that life is not solely defined by worldly accomplishments, but also by the continuous pursuit of spiritual

Naqshbandi Haqqaniyyah: Pendekatan Digital Dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Apokaliptik-Mesianik”, *Graduate Forum: International Conference Post-Graduate UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta*, Vol. 1, no. 01 (2023), 17–28.

⁴⁹Ye Yuan et al., “The Relationship between Self-Consciousness and Depression in College Students: The Chain Mediating Effect of Meaning Life and Self-Efficacy, with the Moderating Effect of Social Support”, *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 24, no. 1 (2024), 1–10.

growth and self-development.

“I have felt calmer and more confident in facing life’s challenges since practicing *dhikr* and *muraqabah* as taught in the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. I have come to understand that every event, whether joyful or burdensome, undoubtedly carries meaning and purpose within God’s will.” (P1/SRD, 27)

“Through the practice of *dhikr* and *muraqabah*, I have begun to view life from a more positive perspective. I realize that life is not merely about pursuing worldly matters, but also about.” (P2/FRP, 28)

Based on participants’ reports, this study reveals that Sufi meditation practices within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order play a significant role in shaping life meaning and fostering deep self-awareness. Generally, mindfulness emphasizes present-moment awareness and the acceptance of experiences without judgment.⁵⁰ However, mindfulness in the context of Sufi meditation is theocentric, wherein awareness is directed toward strengthening a transcendental connection with God, which in turn positively influences psychological well-being.⁵¹ Participant P3’s depiction of the routine practice of *dhikr* and *muraqabah* as a “guidance” for life direction, along with Participant P1’s view that every life event holds meaning within the divine plan, illustrates the presence of a dimension of *divine teleology* that is absent in non-religious mindfulness. This perspective helps individuals accept and interpret reality through God’s will.

Furthermore, Participant P2 emphasized that Sufi meditation fosters

⁵⁰Ying Ma and Angela Fung-ying Siu, “Dispositional Mindfulness and Mental Health in Hong Kong College Students: The Mediating Roles of Decentering and Self-acceptance”, *Australian Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 72, no. 2 (2020): 156–164, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12269>; Fuji Astutik, “Sebuah Systematic Literature Review Mengenai Penerapan Islamic Minfullness Pada Kesehatan Mental”, *Conseils: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2024).

⁵¹Fuad Hamsyah and Subandi, “Dzikir and Happiness: A Mental Health Study on An Indonesian Muslim Sufi Group”, *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (2020), 80–94.

a *value reorientation*, shifting one's focus from materialistic achievements toward spiritual self-development. This process occurs through two primary mechanisms: first, the internalization of spiritual values inherited from the *tariqa* tradition; and second, the reinterpretation of life experiences within a theological framework. Together, these mechanisms contribute to the stability of life meaning, particularly during times of adversity. Thus, this finding expands current *meaning-making* literature by highlighting the theological dimension as a critical distinguishing component.⁵² The practical implication is the necessity of tailoring meditation interventions to align with individuals' value systems and belief orientations. A uniform mindfulness model may be less effective for those with a strong spiritual orientation, whereas Sufi meditation can serve as a more relevant and meaningful intervention for Muslim communities.

Muraqabah as a path to self-control

Self-control is the ability of an individual to choose appropriate responses and behaviors when facing challenges. Individuals with good self-control are generally better at adapting, managing emotions, and making sound decisions. In contrast, low self-control can lead to difficulties in decision-making, challenges in adjustment, and even mental health issues.⁵³ Additionally, self-control is considered essential in achieving mental well-being and aiding individuals in adapting to society.⁵⁴ This study found that the practice of *muraqabah*, which involves the awareness of being observed

⁵²Patricia Bamonti et al., "Spirituality Attenuates the Association between Depression Symptom Severity and Meaning in Life", *Aging & Mental Health*, Vol. 20, no. 5 (2016), 494-499.

⁵³L B Forzano and Alexandra Logue, "Self-Control in Adult Humans: Comparison of Qualitatively Different Reinforcers", *Learning and Motivation*, Vol. 25 (1994), 65-82; Christy Zhou Koval et al., "The Burden of Responsibility: Interpersonal Costs of High Self-Control", *Journal of personality and social psychology*, Vol. 108 (2015), 750-766.

⁵⁴Adriel Boals, Michelle R. vanDellen, and Jonathan B. Banks, "The Relationship between Self-Control and Health: The Mediating Effect of Avoidant Coping", *Psychology and Health*, Vol. 26, no. 8 (2011), 1049-1062.

by God, can serve as a form of self-control that positively impacts mental health. As reported by informant P3, the awareness of being watched by God has had a positive effect on their life, and their belief in God brings tranquility when facing challenges and making decisions.

“The awareness that Allah is always watching over me makes me feel calmer when facing challenges. It feels as though every step I take is within His sight, which makes me more cautious in my actions and more confident in making decisions.” (P3/MB, 27)

Informant P2 reported that the continuous awareness of being under God’s watch prompted them to reflect on past negative behaviors, to which they responded by engaging in self-improvement and adopting more positive conduct. This experience fostered positive self-control in managing and responding to thoughts and mental states that arose within them.

“The awareness of being watched by God made me realize the mistakes I had committed in the past. From that point on, I endeavored to improve myself by behaving better, in order to draw closer to Him through the practice of dhikr and meditation.” (P2/FRP, 28)

Furthermore, P1 shared that during Sufi meditation they experienced inner peace through the practice of *muraqabah*, which acts as a control to avoid negative behaviors, as they firmly believe that God is always watching them, wherever they are.

“During dhikr and *muraqabah*, my heart feels at peace. The awareness that God is always watching over me keeps me from engaging in negative behavior, wherever I may be.” (P1/SRD, 27)

Based on reports from several informants, the practice of *muraqabah* in the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order emerges as an effective alternative method for enhancing self-control, applicable in daily life when confronting various life challenges. Individuals with strong self-control tend to be more resilient

to stress, anxiety, and depression.⁵⁵ As demonstrated in previous studies, self-control plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health and overall well-being.⁵⁶ By developing the capacity to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, individuals become better equipped to navigate life's challenges, reduce the risk of excessive stress, and strengthen social relationships.⁵⁷ In this context, *muraqabah* functions as an internal mechanism that shapes emotional regulation, decision-making, and adaptation to the social environment. The awareness of being under God's observation cultivates greater caution in one's actions, a commitment to self-correction from negative behaviors, and the avoidance of conduct that contradicts moral and spiritual values. This is consistent with the concept of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) in Sufi literature, which underscores self-control as both an expression of obedience and a means of deepening one's closeness to God.⁵⁸

The relationship between *muraqabah* and self-control can be understood through an individual's capacity to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in accordance with internalized moral and spiritual values. The awareness of being under God's observation fosters ongoing self-evaluation, the avoidance of behaviors that contravene religious teachings, and the maintenance of consistency in positive conduct. Empirical studies have demonstrated that self-control plays a critical role in maintaining mental health, as it helps individuals reduce stress, manage anxiety,⁵⁹ and prevent impulsive behaviors that could negatively impact psychological well-

⁵⁵Tong-Ao Zeng et al., "Relationship between Mindfulness and Self-Control in Deaf Individuals: Mediating Role of Inner Peace and Moderating Role of Life Experience", *BMC Psychology*, Vol. 13, no. 16 (2025), 1–10.

⁵⁶Nizamie, Katshu, and Uvais, "Erratum: Sufism and Mental Health..."

⁵⁷Ihsan Akeren et al., "The Effect of Self-Regulation on the Need for Psychological Help Through Happiness, Resilience, Problem Solving, Self-Efficacy, and Adjustment: A Parallel Mediation Study in Adolescent Groups", *Children*, Vol. 12, no. 4 (2025), 1–17.

⁵⁸M. Agus Wahyudi, "Psychological Well-Being Sufism Practitioners as A Sufistic Counseling", *Konseling Religi*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2020), 145–159.

⁵⁹Saifuddin, "The Elaboration of Sufism..."

being.⁶⁰ In this regard, *muraqabah* not only fosters spiritual awareness but also serves as a religious coping mechanism that facilitates psychological resilience and emotional stability, thereby contributing to improved mental health. Thus, *muraqabah* can be understood as a spiritual practice with significant psychological implications, particularly in strengthening self-control and enhancing mental well-being. These findings reinforce the view that spiritually based interventions can serve as effective approaches in psychotherapy and mental health promotion, especially within Muslim communities.⁶¹

Attaining inner peace

In addition to self-control, one of the significant experiences reported by several informants participating in meditation rituals within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order is *inner peace*. This experience emerges through the practice of *muraqabah* within Sufi meditation. In this context, *muraqabah* is understood as an awareness of God's presence and supervision in all aspects of life, fostering a state of spiritual vigilance alongside psychological tranquility.⁶² Informant P1 reported that through the practice of *muraqabah*, they attained profound inner peace, rooted in the conviction that God is constantly observing and accompanying them in every step of life. These findings suggest that *muraqabah* contributes not only to behavioral regulation but also to emotional stability and psychological well-being.

“After practicing *muraqabah*, I experience a deep sense of tranquility in my heart. It feels as if there is always a presence accompanying, protecting, and watching over every step I take. This assurance gives me

⁶⁰Boals, vanDellen, and Banks, “The Relationship between Self-Control and Health...”

⁶¹Nazila Isgandarova, “Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy in Islamic Psychotherapy”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 58, no. 4 (2019), 1146–1160.

⁶²Yusuf, “Inter-Subjectivity of Khalwat...”

confidence that there is nothing to fear.” (P1/SRD, 27)

Informant P2 reported a similar experience, describing an extraordinary sense of calm during the practice of *muraqabah*, where the heart felt light and the mind clearer. They further added that this practice helped them accept themselves as they are and live life with a sense of peace.

“My heart feels very light, and my mind becomes clearer. I am better able to accept myself and live life unburdened, experiencing inner peace.” (P2/FRP, 28)

Meanwhile, Informant P3 revealed that during *muraqabah*, they experienced profound peace, as if being embraced by God’s compassion. This feeling alleviated their anxiety and stress, bringing in tranquility that fully encompassed both their heart and mind. Such experiences indicate that *muraqabah* not only affects transient emotional states but also contributes to more stable and enduring psychological well-being.

“I feel a tranquility as if being embraced by Allah compassion. All anxiety disappears, replaced by a calmness and peace that fills both my heart and mind.” (P3/MB, 27)

Based on participants’ reports, Sufi meditation practices within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order not only serve to alleviate stress but also play a significant role in attaining a deeper sense of inner peace. Regular engagement in *dhikr* and *muraqabah* enables participants to be better prepared for emotional and psychological challenges, while simultaneously enhancing their overall quality of life. Consistent with these findings, previous research indicates that spiritual practices such as *muraqabah* can enhance emotional well-being, reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and comprehensively support mental health.⁶³

The inner peace that positively impacts mental health can be conceptualized as *psychospiritual balance*, a harmonious state between

⁶³Karim Mitha, “Sufism and Healing”, *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, Vol. 21, no. 3 (2019), 194–205.

spiritual dimensions and mental well-being that enhances an individual's quality of life. In this context, the tranquility attained through spiritual practices such as *muraqabah* and *dhikr* has been shown to make a significant contribution to reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. Consequently, Sufi meditation programs can be regarded as an effective approach for achieving inner peace, which, in turn, plays a vital role in safeguarding an individual's mental health.

Muhasabah as cognitive restructuring

Muhasabah is a form of self-reflection aimed at evaluating one's speech, thoughts, emotions, and actions—both outward and inward—as a means of continuous self-improvement.⁶⁴ Within the context of psychotherapy, this practice holds a holistic purpose, including its potential application as a therapeutic model. Mental health problems are often rooted in irrational thoughts and beliefs that trigger cognitive distortions, such as the emergence of negative ideas that lead to anxiety, stress, and depression.⁶⁵

Participants reported that *muhasabah*, within the framework of Sufi meditation, significantly influenced the process of cognitive restructuring. Participant P1 stated that, prior to engaging in this practice, they often compared themselves to others, which triggered feelings of sadness and self-blame for not achieving the accomplishments attained by others. Through *muhasabah*, they came to realize that each individual possesses their own

⁶⁴Yumna et al., “Implementasi Terapi Muhasabah Sebagai Upaya Memelihara Kesehatan Mental Dalam Usaha Penanggulangan Adiksi Narkotika (Studi Lapangan Lapas Narkotika Cirebon)”, *Syifa al-Qulub: Jurnal Studi Psikoterapi Sufistik*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (2021), 95–112.

⁶⁵Edward C. Chang and Will B. Bridewell, “Irrational Beliefs, Optimism, Pessimism, and Psychological Distress: A Preliminary Examination of Differential Effects in a College Population”, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 54, no. 2 (1998), 137–42.

strengths and weaknesses, and developed the belief that everything that happens in life is a divine blessing to be accepted and cherished with gratitude.

“In the past, I often felt insecure because I compared myself to others. After engaging in *muhasabah* regularly, I realized that every individual has their own life path and unique strengths. Everything that happens is a gift from Allah, and it is something I must be grateful for.” (P1/SRD, 27)

Informant P2 reported that she frequently experienced anxiety stemming from fears about an uncertain future. Through *muhasabah*, she came to understand the importance of involving God’s power in navigating life and its challenges. She believed that what seemed impossible for her could become possible through God’s will.

“I used to often feel fearful about a future that seemed uncertain and bleak. *Muhasabah* has taught me that I am never alone, for Allah, the Almighty, is always present. If Allah wills, even what seems impossible can indeed happen.” (P2/FRP, 28)

Meanwhile, Informant P3 shared a more personal experience. She had once been trapped in negative thoughts stemming from guilt over past sins, to the point where the idea of ending her life had crossed her mind. However, through *muhasabah*, she came to realize that God was still granting her the opportunity to improve herself. This awareness prompted a transformation in her self-perception—from a predominantly negative view to a more positive one.

“There was a time when I felt that life was not worth living because of my sins. However, through *muhasabah*, I realized that Allah had still granted me time to change. Since then, I have learned to view life with a more positive outlook.” (P3/MB, 27)

Based on these findings, *muhasabah* encourages individuals to identify negative or irrational thoughts and beliefs, and subsequently replace them

with more positive and adaptive ones. This process involves recognizing negative thoughts and transforming them into more constructive beliefs—a mechanism known in psychology as *cognitive restructuring*.⁶⁶ This technique aims to modify patterns of thinking, emotions, and behavior by identifying maladaptive cognitive habits and replacing negative or irrational self-perceptions with more rational, realistic, and psychologically supportive perspectives.⁶⁷

The study provides robust support for previous research demonstrating that the practice of *muhasabah* can serve as a highly effective approach for sustaining and enhancing mental health. Within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, *muhasabah* is not merely a reflective exercise but a structured spiritual discipline that cultivates self-awareness, facilitates moral introspection, and promotes emotional regulation. In this tradition, *muhasabah* is intrinsically linked with other core spiritual practices—such as *dhikr* (the remembrance of God) and *muraqabah* (spiritual mindfulness)—which collectively strengthen the follower’s sense of divine presence and foster an enduring connection with God. This integrated approach helps reduce stress, alleviate anxiety, and equip individuals with greater resilience when facing life’s challenges and uncertainties. Regular engagement in *dhikr* and *muraqabah* nurtures inner calm and enhances attentional control, while *muhasabah* functions as a form of cognitive restructuring, enabling the replacement of maladaptive thoughts with more constructive and rational perspectives. As such, Sufi meditation in the Naqshbandi Haqqani framework operates as a holistic and culturally grounded means of achieving psychospiritual equilibrium. It

⁶⁶Laurent Caplette and Nicholas B. Turk-Browne, “Computational Reconstruction of Mental Representations Using Human Behavior”, *Nature Communications*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2024), 1–19.

⁶⁷L Wang et al., “The Effectiveness and Implementation of Psychological First Aid as a Therapeutic Intervention After Trauma: An Integrative Review”, *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, Vol. 25, no. 4 (2024), 2638–2656.

not only contributes to psychological stability but also enriches the overall quality of life, making it a valuable model for integrating spirituality into contemporary mental health promotion.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Sufi meditation within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order makes a significant contribution to the enhancement of followers' mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Through the practices of *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah*, practitioners strengthen their spiritual connection with God, fostering a sense of security, inner peace, and a profound awareness of His presence in daily life. Sufi meditation further facilitates the discovery of meaning and clarity of purpose, enabling individuals to approach life's challenges with gratitude and self-assurance. In particular, improvements in mental health are reflected in three key dimensions: (1) self-regulation through *muraqabah*, which enables more prudent management of emotions and behaviors; (2) attainment of inner peace through *muraqabah*, which alleviates emotional distress and cultivates tranquility; and (3) cognitive restructuring through *muhasabah*, which transforms negative thoughts into more positive and realistic beliefs. This shift in perspective contributes to a psychospiritual transformation that supports emotional well-being, reduces stress, and enhances resilience in facing life's adversities. These findings suggest that Sufi meditation can serve as an effective holistic approach to strengthening mental health. Future research is recommended to further explore the role of spirituality in mental health within cross-cultural contexts and to identify both universal and culturally specific elements that contribute to the effectiveness of such practices.

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