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## SUFISM AS A PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH TO SUICIDE CASES

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### Abstract

This article examines the role of Sufism and spirituality as a problem-solving approach in addressing suicide, which remains one of the most critical issues in contemporary mental health discourse. The study employs a qualitative method based on library research, drawing on both primary and secondary sources, including classical Sufi texts and contemporary academic works on spirituality, psychology, and mental health. Through systematic textual analysis, the research explores how spiritual concepts within Sufism contribute to coping mechanisms for individuals experiencing psychological distress. The findings indicate that Sufism provides a profound framework for addressing suicide-related tendencies through spiritual development, particularly by strengthening the relationship with God (*ma'rifatullah*), cultivating self-control (*mujahadah al-nafs*), and fostering acceptance of divine destiny (*tawakkul*). These dimensions function as internal resources that help individuals manage emotional stress, existential anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness, which are commonly identified as key risk factors for suicidal ideation. In conclusion, Sufism and spirituality demonstrate significant potential as both preventive and therapeutic approaches in suicide prevention. The study recommends the integration of Sufi values into mental health programs to offer more holistic solutions in addressing psychological crises, enabling individuals to confront life challenges with greater resilience, meaning, and spiritual awareness.

**Keywords:** Sufism; Spirituality; Problem solving; Suicede

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### INTRODUCTION

Suicide has become a serious problem that is increasingly prevalent in various parts of the world, including Indonesia. This act is often driven by feelings of hopelessness, depression, loneliness, and an inability to find meaning in life (Litaqia & Permana, 2019). In many cases, individuals facing such conditions feel trapped in emotional and psychological darkness, with no perceived way out. Therefore, efforts to prevent suicide require not only medical and psychological approaches but also significant spiritual dimensions (Litaqia & Permana, 2019). Sufism, as a branch of Islamic teachings that emphasizes the inner dimension and closeness to God, plays an important role in helping individuals cope with life's difficulties and attain inner peace (Meliniar, 2023). Thus, inner peace can be grounded in Sufism, which may help prevent individuals from committing suicide.

In Sufi teachings, the attainment of true happiness does not lie in material possessions but in surrendering oneself to God, purifying the soul, and seeking a deeper meaning of life (Putra, 2013). Both Sufism and spirituality focus on meaning in life and share an equal capacity to provide tranquility and hope in facing life's hardships. By integrating Sufism and spirituality, individuals struggling with despair can be guided toward finding inner peace and a more profound sense of life's purpose (Putra, 2013). Concepts such as *tawakkul* (trust in God), *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification), and closeness to God through prayer and remembrance (*dhikr*) form a strong foundation for psychological and emotional recovery (Fitrawati, 2021).

Before focusing on the main problem, it is important to map previous studies in the field. In the literature review, several studies are related to Sufism and spirituality. For instance, Malika Nofriza Sagita, in her study *The Role of Sufism in Addressing the*

*Crisis of Modern Society*, focuses on how contemporary social life is affected by science and technology.

However, this study is limited to general societal crises and does not specifically address problem-solving frameworks or suicide cases (Sagita, 2023). In contrast, Wulida and Iman offer a different scope by examining how spirituality influences the risk of suicide (Litaqia & Permana, 2019). Based on these previous studies, this research aims to explore how Sufism and spirituality can function as a problem-solving approach to suicide cases. Therefore, within the context of suicide prevention, Sufism and spirituality offer a “path of light” as an alternative framework that addresses the root causes of despair and guides individuals back toward hope and a meaningful life.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a library research approach. All data used are derived from various literature sources such as books, academic journals, scholarly articles, and other relevant academic materials related to the focus of the study. This approach does not require a physical research site, as the entire data collection process is conducted through the exploration, reading, and analysis of written texts available in documented form. Within this framework, the researcher conducts a critical review of various theories of Sufism and concepts of spirituality, which are then connected to problem-solving efforts regarding social phenomena, particularly suicide cases. The analysis does not merely stop at describing concepts, but also seeks to examine the interconnections among ideas and interpret how Sufi values can be understood as an alternative approach to addressing psychological and existential problems. This study emphasizes interpretation and synthesis of ideas from multiple literary sources, resulting in a reflective and analytical understanding of the role of Sufism in responding to contemporary life problems.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Sufism, Spirituality, and Suicide Prevention**

In the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is understood as a spiritual discipline centered on *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *tahdhib al-akhlaq* (ethical refinement), as systematically elaborated in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* by Imam al-Ghazali. Within this framework, psychological conditions such as despair, anxiety, and loss of meaning are not merely viewed as mental disturbances, but as manifestations of a diseased *qalb* (heart). For al-Ghazali, such conditions can only be healed through strengthening one's orientation toward the Divine. Similarly, al-Qushayri in *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyah* emphasizes that Sufism is a path of returning the heart to its innate state of tranquility (*sakinah*) through continuous spiritual discipline (*riyadah*).

As existential crises deepen, Sufi literature provides a more precise diagnosis of their root cause, particularly through the concept of meaning-disconnection from God. Ibn Ataillah al-Sakandari in *al-Hikam* asserts that despair arises when human beings overly depend on anything other than Allah, thereby losing their inner center of tranquility. In this logic, psychological suffering is not solely a mental disorder but a spiritual dislocation that disrupts existential balance. Healing, therefore, is directed not only at cognitive restructuring but also at re-establishing the ontological relationship

between human beings and God. From this point, the discussion extends to how spirituality constructs broader structures of meaning in human life.

Spirituality in Islam is inseparable from the integration of faith (*iman*), worship (*ibadah*), and ethical conduct (*akhlaq*), which together form a unified human experience. Ibn Arabi in *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* conceptualizes spirituality as *tajalli*—the manifestation of the Divine presence within human consciousness. This perspective indicates that spirituality is not merely a subjective experience, but an ontological structure that orients human existence. When this structure weakens, individuals may experience an existential vacuum, which in modern psychological discourse is often associated with suicidal ideation.

From the perspective of social psychology, Durkheim argues that suicide is not only an individual phenomenon but is strongly influenced by the level of social integration. When individuals become detached from social structures, they lose normative guidance that sustains life meaningfully. However, when interpreted through a Sufi lens, such integration is not merely material-social but also spiritual, embodied in what can be termed a *spiritual community of meaning* (*ummah ruhaniyyah*). Disconnection from this spiritual community intensifies existential vulnerability and deepens the crisis of meaning. This leads the analysis toward internal psychological dynamics.

Freud, on the other hand, interprets suicide as a form of redirected aggression resulting from unresolved psychic conflict. In contrast, within al-Ghazali's Sufi framework, such conflict is understood as the dominance of the *nafs al-ammarah* (commanding self) that remains unrefined. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that an uncontrolled ego generates illusions of hopelessness, despite the continuous presence of divine mercy. Thus, Sufism reframes psychological crisis as a form of spiritual imbalance requiring meaning-based therapy. This perspective aligns with classical Islamic medical thought, which emphasizes psychic equilibrium as the foundation of human well-being.

Ibn Sina in *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* asserts that human health depends on the balance between physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. This conception corresponds with Sufism, which places the *qalb* as the integrative center of all these dimensions. From a Sufi standpoint, a diseased heart produces distorted perceptions of reality, including the belief that life has lost meaning. Therefore, healing cannot rely solely on medical intervention, but requires spiritual therapy capable of restoring existential balance. One of the central mechanisms in Sufism is *dhikr*, which al-Qushayri defines as continuous awareness of the presence of Allah. Dhikr functions not only as verbal remembrance but as a transformation of consciousness from fragmentation to spiritual integration. In psychological terms, it operates as an affective regulation mechanism that reduces anxiety and emotional distress. Thus, dhikr is simultaneously ritualistic and therapeutic within the psychospiritual structure of human beings.

The concepts of *raja'* (hope) and *khauf* (fear of God), as elaborated by al-Ghazali, establish a crucial psychological equilibrium. *Raja'* fosters existential optimism that prevents despair, while *khauf* maintains moral awareness and self-regulation. Their balance produces inner stability that can be understood in modern psychology as resilience. When this balance is disrupted, individuals become vulnerable to existential distortion that may lead to crisis.

The social dimension of Sufism is reflected in the concept of *ukhuwah ruhaniyyah* (spiritual brotherhood), which manifests in gatherings of dhikr and knowledge (*majlis al-‘ilm*). Historically, Sufi communities have functioned as collective therapeutic spaces providing emotional and spiritual support. Contemporary psychology recognizes this as social support, a key protective factor against suicidal behavior. Thus, Sufism operates not only at the individual level but also constructs a supportive psychosocial ecosystem. Ibn Ataillah further argues that human suffering often arises from excessive dependence on created beings rather than the Creator. When hope is anchored solely in worldly outcomes, failure produces profound existential emptiness. Sufism reconstructs this orientation by redirecting dependence from creation toward the Divine. This shift generates existential stability because meaning is no longer contingent on unstable external conditions.

Inductively, Sufi literature suggests that suicide prevention is fundamentally rooted in the reconstruction of meaning at a holistic level. Sufism operates simultaneously on three dimensions: epistemological (how reality is understood), ontological (how existence is interpreted), and practical (how life is lived). These dimensions collectively form a stable system of consciousness. Thus, Sufism does not merely regulate emotions but reorganizes the entire structure of human meaning-making. In conclusion, Sufism may be understood as a holistic approach to suicide prevention that integrates spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions simultaneously. It is not intended to replace medical or psychological interventions, but rather to function as a layer of existential meaning that strengthens human psychological resilience and restores the coherence of life purpose.

### **Sufism as Problem Solving in Suicide Prevention**

If placed within a theoretical framework, Sufism functions as a mechanism for restructuring the meaning of life. The concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* as elaborated in al-Qushayri's *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* indicates that the human soul is inherently fluctuating between hope and despair. When despair dominates, individuals lose their transcendental orientation. In this condition, Sufism operates as an epistemological instrument that restores the awareness that life is not merely a psychological burden, but a divinely ordained arena of testing (*ibtilā’*).

Furthermore, the problem-solving mechanism in Sufism can be observed through the concept of *mujāhadah al-nafs*. In *Kimiya’ al-Sa’adah*, al-Ghazali explains that an untrained soul is easily driven by destructive impulses. From this perspective, suicidal behavior does not emerge suddenly, but rather accumulates from weakened self-control and the erosion of spiritual discipline. Therefore, *mujāhadah* becomes a crucial instrument in restraining, delaying, and redirecting destructive impulses toward more meaningful religious and ethical actions.

At a deeper level, Sufism operates through the construction of *ma’rifatullah* as the peak of spiritual consciousness. Ibn ‘Arabi in *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* explains that divine recognition produces existential awareness that the human being is never truly disconnected from divine mercy. Once internalized, suffering is no longer perceived as an endpoint but as part of a spiritual journey. In this sense, *ma’rifatullah* functions as an antithesis to psychological nihilism, which often underlies suicidal ideation.

At the operational level, Sufism introduces *dhikrullāh* as a form of affective regulation. In *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, al-Bukhari highlights the calming effect of

remembering God. Psychologically, dhikr can be understood as a repetitive cognitive practice that stabilizes emotions and reduces anxiety intensity. In existential crises, dhikr functions as a “pause space” that interrupts destructive thought patterns, allowing individuals to re-evaluate life meaning more consciously.

However, Sufism does not remain at the individual level. In *Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, the relationship between disciple (*murid*) and spiritual guide (*mursyid*) demonstrates that spiritual development is inherently relational. In the context of suicide prevention, this relationship can be understood as structured psychospiritual support. The presence of a guide functions as a moral anchor that assists individuals in navigating inner crises, resembling modern counseling but grounded in Islamic spiritual epistemology. Additionally, the concept of *raja'* (hope) in Sufism plays a reconstructive role against existential emptiness. In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazali emphasizes that hope in divine mercy must outweigh despair. In suicidal conditions, despair often becomes the critical tipping point. Therefore, the internalization of *raja'* functions as a counter-narrative against the belief that life no longer holds any future possibility.

Alongside this, the concept of *khawf* (fear of God) functions as a mechanism of impulse control. In Sufi literature, *khawf* is not pathological fear, but ethical consciousness regarding the consequences of human actions. When *khawf* is balanced with *raja'*, individuals attain psychospiritual stability. This equilibrium prevents emotional extremities that often trigger impulsive actions such as suicide. From a social perspective, Sufism constructs what is traditionally referred to as *suhbah* (spiritual companionship). In al-Sarraj's *al-Luma'*, Sufi communities are portrayed as spaces of moral and emotional reinforcement. In contemporary terms, such communities function as protective social systems that reduce psychological isolation, which is widely recognized in modern studies as a major risk factor for suicide.

Furthermore, Sufism also contains an educational dimension through moral formation (*akhlak*). In *Bidayat al-Hidayah*, al-Ghazali emphasizes the cultivation of adab as the foundation of spiritual health. This moral formation not only regulates the individual's relationship with God, but also with others. In the context of suicide prevention, *akhlak* provides a social structure that fosters belonging, recognition, and emotional validation—key protective factors against psychological crisis. Taken integratively, Sufism offers a three-layered solution: cognitive (meaning reconstruction), affective (emotional regulation), and social (community support). These layers operate simultaneously in mitigating self-destructive tendencies. Within this framework, Sufism can be understood not only as a spiritual tradition, but also as a value-based therapeutic model (*value-based therapy*) within Islamic psychology, as also reflected in contemporary discourse on psychospiritual interventions.

### **Integrated Model of Sufism and Modern Psychology in Suicide Prevention**

The development of an integrative model between Sufism and modern psychology emerges from the awareness that suicide cannot be reduced solely to either a spiritual symptom or a purely psychological disorder. In contemporary psychological discourse, suicidal behavior is understood as the result of complex interactions among cognitive, affective, and social factors (Joiner, 2005; Putra et al., 2024). In contrast, within the Sufi tradition, psychological crisis is interpreted as a disorientation of the *qalb* caused by a weakened relationship with God. Therefore, integrating both

perspectives becomes essential to construct a more comprehensive framework that addresses both meaning and behavior simultaneously.

Theoretically, modern psychology provides analytical tools such as the cognitive-behavioral model, which explains that repetitive negative thoughts can shape destructive behaviors. In this context, Sufism can be positioned as a spiritually grounded cognitive restructuring system, particularly through the concept of *muhasabah al-nafs* as articulated in al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. *Muhasabah* enables individuals to observe and reflect upon internal thoughts and impulses, closely resembling the principle of self-monitoring in cognitive psychology. Similarly, the psychological concept of cognitive reappraisal finds a parallel in *husn al-ẓann billāh* (having a positive assumption of God), which reframes suffering as part of divine wisdom. Thus, Sufism provides a parallel structure of meaning reconstruction to cognitive therapy.

At the affective level, modern psychology emphasizes emotion regulation as a key mechanism in preventing impulsive behavior, including suicide. Within Sufism, the practice of *dhikr* functions as a repetitive attentional and emotional regulation technique. Empirical studies in psychology of religion suggest that spiritual practices such as meditation and *dhikr* are associated with reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms (Hidayati et al., 2021). In this sense, *dhikr* operates as a spiritually grounded emotional stabilization mechanism.

Furthermore, the psychological concept of mindfulness closely corresponds to *murāqabah* in Sufism. *Murāqabah* emphasizes continuous awareness of divine presence, thereby strengthening self-awareness and impulse control. In the context of suicide prevention, this practice creates a cognitive "pause space" that interrupts destructive impulses before they are enacted.

At the motivational level, positive psychology introduces the hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which consists of agency and pathway thinking. In Sufi thought, *rāja'* (hope in God's mercy) functions as a spiritual source of agency, while *tawakkal* (trust in God) operates as a pathway cognition that guides individuals to persist through hardship. The combination of these concepts produces a resilient motivational structure capable of sustaining individuals during existential crises.

From a social perspective, modern psychology highlights the importance of social support systems in reducing suicide risk. Durkheim has long emphasized that weak social integration increases vulnerability to suicidal behavior. In Sufism, concepts such as *suhbah* (spiritual companionship) and *jamaah dhikr* function as spiritually grounded forms of social integration. These communities not only provide emotional support but also construct collective identity that reduces existential isolation.

This integrative model also aligns with existential approaches such as meaning-centered therapy. Viktor Frankl argues that the loss of meaning is a core driver of severe despair. In Sufism, meaning is reconstructed through *ma'rifatullah*, the awareness that life is oriented toward divine purpose. Thus, Sufism provides a metaphysical foundation for restoring meaning in psychologically distressed individuals. Modern psychology operates primarily through empirical and clinical methods, while Sufism works through internalization of values and spiritual experience. Their integration produces a multi-layered intervention model: psychology addresses symptoms and behavior, while Sufism engages deeper structures of meaning and consciousness. In practice, this

integration can be implemented through Islamic spiritual counseling that combines cognitive-behavioral techniques with Sufi-based practices such as *dhikr*, reflection (*tafakkur*), and self-evaluation.

However, such integration requires methodological caution to avoid reducing Sufism into a mere psychological technique. Classical scholars such as al-Qushayri in *al-Risālah* emphasize that Sufism is fundamentally a path of ontological transformation, not simply a therapeutic method. Therefore, any integrative model must preserve the transcendental dimension of Sufism as its epistemological core. In conclusion, the integrative model of Sufism and modern psychology offers a holistic framework for understanding and preventing suicide. It operates simultaneously across behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. This synthesis demonstrates that addressing the crises of modern humanity cannot rely solely on scientific rationality, but also requires the depth of spiritual meaning embedded in the Islamic Sufi tradition.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion developed in this study, it can be understood that the approach of Sufism (tasawuf) and spirituality offers a profound framework of meaning in responding to the problem of suicide. Sufism is not merely a religious tradition characterized by ritual practices, but also a value system that shapes the structure of human consciousness in interpreting life, suffering, and hope. Through the internalization of key concepts such as *ma'rifatullah*, *dhikr*, *raja'*, and *khawf*, individuals are directed to reconstruct their orientation toward life that may have been distorted by psychological and existential crises. Furthermore, the Sufi approach operates not only at the cognitive and emotional levels but also reaches the deepest dimension of the human spiritual self. In this regard, the meaning of life is not positioned as a purely secular-psychological construct, but as a transcendent reality directly connected to God. Consequently, states of despair that often function as triggering factors for suicidal behavior can be reconstructed through the strengthening of spiritual awareness and a more stable religious consciousness.

In addition, the social dimension within Sufism highlights an important role in the psychospiritual recovery process of individuals. The presence of spiritual communities, *dhikr* assemblies, and the teacher–disciple relationship within the Sufi tradition provides significant emotional and social support. This reinforces findings that social isolation is one of the major risk factors for suicidal behavior, thereby making spiritually based social integration a relevant form of protection. Thus, the Sufi approach can be understood as an alternative paradigm in suicide prevention that is holistic in nature, as it does not only focus on symptom treatment but also on reconstructing life meaning and strengthening the relationship between humans, God, and others. This approach demonstrates that mental health cannot be separated from spiritual health. Finally, this study still opens space for further development, particularly in the form of comparative studies between Sufi approaches and modern psychological interventions, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or other evidence-based psychotherapeutic approaches. Such comparison is expected to enrich the scientific discourse on the integration of contemporary psychology and Islamic spiritual traditions in addressing mental health issues, especially depression and suicidal tendencies.

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