

The Combination of Sufism and Psychotherapy in Dealing with Burnout Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

Burnout syndrome has increasingly affected individuals who experience prolonged work-related stress, leading to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. Conventional psychotherapy is often used to address stress; however, it may not yield optimal results, particularly in communities with strong religious orientations. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of integrating Sufism and psychotherapy approaches in addressing burnout syndrome. This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach, in which data were collected through the review of various literature sources such as books, scientific articles, and national as well as international journals. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis, focusing on theoretical discussions related to Sufism, psychotherapy, and the concept of burnout. The findings indicate that Sufi practices, including dzikr, tafakkur, and muhasabah, can help individuals calm their minds, balance emotions, and strengthen their spiritual connection with God. When integrated with contemporary psychotherapy, Sufism serves not only as a spiritual path but also as a therapeutic approach that enhances mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. In conclusion, the combination of Sufism and psychotherapy provides a holistic and effective approach to managing burnout syndrome, as it harmonizes psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in achieving overall well-being.

Keywords: Burnout Syndrome, Sufism, Psychotherapy, Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout syndrome is a psychological phenomenon increasingly experienced by individuals across various occupational sectors, particularly in the modern era characterized by high professional demands and social pressures. (Arroisi and Afifah 2022) According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), burnout is categorized as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Its symptoms include

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. A global survey conducted by Gallup (2020) indicates that approximately 76% of workers experience burnout at various levels of severity, while in Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Manpower (2022) states that more than 50% of the workforce admits to experiencing psychological pressure due to excessive workloads and an imbalance between work and personal life. These facts highlight that burnout is a serious issue requiring attention from both psychological and spiritual perspectives. (Alis Wulan Andari 2022)

Burnout not only impacts mental health, such as stress, depression, and loss of motivation, but also causes physical disturbances like headaches, sleep disorders, muscle pain, and reduced immune function. In the long term, this condition can affect the quality of an individual's social relationships and work productivity. Therefore, various approaches have been developed to address burnout, one of which is through psychotherapy, focusing on restoring the mental and emotional balance of the individual. Nevertheless, conventional psychotherapy approaches often fail to address the spiritual aspects of human beings, whereas spirituality plays a crucial role in providing meaning, tranquility, and inner strength in facing life's pressures.

Tasawuf emerges as a spiritual approach oriented toward soul purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and enhancing self-awareness of God's presence. Sufi psychotherapy views that true healing encompasses not only mental aspects but also the spiritual connection between humans and Allah. The three main stages in Sufism, takhalli (purifying oneself from negative traits), tahalli (filling oneself with positive traits), and tajalli (attaining the highest spiritual awareness) represent an inner

transformation process that can help individuals overcome burnout through heart purification and strengthening life's meaning. (Br and Syamsuddin 2025) Thus, tasawuf not only offers a religious solution but also serves as a means of transcendental psychotherapy that balances the psychic and spiritual aspects of human beings.

This study stems from the need to find a more holistic approach in addressing burnout syndrome. Unlike previous research that often highlights general psychological interventions, this study attempts to explore the relevance of Sufi values in the context of burnout healing, as well as how Islamic spiritual principles can contribute to mental health.

The objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the Sufi psychotherapy approach in reducing burnout syndrome symptoms, while also explaining how spiritual values such as patience, tranquility, and surrender can foster psychological resilience in individuals experiencing work-related stress.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to deeply understand the burnout syndrome phenomenon and its relevance to Sufi psychotherapy through the analysis of meanings and contexts contained in literature sources. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative approach is used to explore and understand meanings derived from human experiences or perspectives on a phenomenon. Meanwhile, Zed (2014) explains that library research is a research method conducted by utilizing written sources such as books, scientific journals, research reports, and other relevant documents to obtain conceptual and theoretical data.

In this study, the data sources consist of two types, namely primary and secondary sources.

1. Primary sources include scientific works and primary literature discussing the concept of Sufism, Islamic psychotherapy, and burnout theories such as the work of Maslach and Jackson (1981) that developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as the main framework in understanding burnout dimensions.
2. Secondary sources include journal articles, books, and scientific publications that support discussions related to the relationship between spirituality, psychotherapy, and mental health.

Data collection techniques were carried out by searching literature through various scientific databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and DOAJ, using keywords such as "burnout syndrome," "psychotherapy," "Sufism," and "Islamic counseling." Each obtained literature was then selected based on criteria of relevance, validity, and novelty of the source.

The data collection process was conducted through several stages:

1. Identification and selection of literature relevant to the research theme.
2. Classification of data based on subtopics, such as burnout concepts, Sufi principles, and integration of Sufi psychotherapy.
3. Synthesis and interpretation of data to find patterns, relationships, and conceptual conclusions.

The data analysis technique used is qualitative descriptive analysis, namely by describing, interpreting, and critically examining literature findings. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis includes three main stages, namely

data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In this study, each collected data was reduced to focus on the main theme, presented in a systematic description, and then interpreted to obtain new understanding regarding the relevance of Sufi psychotherapy to the handling of burnout syndrome.

Thus, this research method is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the integration between Sufism and psychotherapy as a spiritual approach in addressing the burnout syndrome phenomenon, as well as enriching academic literature in the fields of Islamic counseling and mental health.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Burnout, an increasingly prevalent issue in occupational health and work productivity, requires serious attention from stakeholders. The World Health Organization (WHO) has officially defined Burnout Syndrome (BOS) as an occupational symptom. This phenomenon is caused by workplace stress, not stress from other aspects of life. The emergence of increasingly intense emotional exhaustion is a crucial aspect of fatigue (Lestaluhu et al. 2023). The loss of energy and emotional resources is a sign of individual stress. Cynicism or depersonalization refers to situations where individuals interact with others and exhibit negative, cynical, or detached responses from various aspects of work (Rosita 2021).

Burnout syndrome, or also referred to as job burnout, is characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion. This occurs due to unmet expectations and the fact that work does not proceed as anticipated (Vanela 2024). When overwhelmed by continuous orders from superiors that cannot be fulfilled, one can experience work-related stress as well. If this situation is not addressed, one may begin to lose interest in their job and find

no motivation to continue. Work productivity ultimately declines (Indah Rahmawati Putri and Ageng S. Kanda 2024). This means that burnout syndrome is a mental health condition marked by long-term fatigue, loss of motivation, and decreased performance. Although it can be experienced by anyone, this condition more frequently occurs in individuals working in highly competitive and high-pressure environments. Burnout syndrome has become one of the most common mental health issues faced by society in recent years.

However, burnout syndrome differs from stress. Based on a journal researching burnout among librarians, it is stated that library staff experiencing stress tend to be emotionally active and aggressive, but library staff experiencing burnout will lose motivation, aspirations, and hope. Library staff experiencing stress also tend to suffer physical health declines, such as flu, headaches, and other digestive issues. Although library staff experiencing stress and burnout exhibit different responses, both are major problems in their work (Fatmawati 2017). Burnout, which can cause health issues and reduced work enthusiasm, can occur due to poorly managed and prolonged stress (Fatmawati 2017).

The tendency toward burnout can be influenced by internal and external factors in achieving work success. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is another internal component. Emotional intelligence is considered more important than cognitive intelligence in determining how well someone performs their job (Diansyah and Lazi 2025). The ability to observe, understand, and integrate emotions with thoughts to promote personal growth is known as emotional intelligence. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more successful in coping with workplace pressures that can lead to exhaustion. In addition to personal factors,

environmental factors are crucial in addressing high workload pressures caused by their jobs. Positive appraisal, informational support, emotional support, and instrumental support are examples of environmental factors that can help. Thanks to high support from the surrounding environment, individuals become better at handling work problems that can lead to burnout (Adjeng and Adawiyah 2013).

Tasawuf, or Sufism, is a spiritual aspect of Islam that emphasizes soul purification and character formation through practices such as dhikr, prayer, and meditation. This method brings one closer to God while also improving one's mental health (Sensia 2025). Tasawuf can offer a new perspective in addressing psychological issues in a more spiritual and emotional manner in psychotherapy. Tasawuf creates a connection between humans and their God. The entire psyche and inner components are included within it. Tasawuf is a therapy that refers to all human elements, thus resulting in a calm and peaceful attitude (Suhartiningsih 2021). There is a straight line between humans and their God. Believing in one's God will make humans calm.

Tasawuf, a branch of Islamic mysticism, offers a rich and profound spiritual healing perspective that can be utilized in the treatment and therapy of mental illnesses (Amri 2025). Two fundamental concepts in Sufism that are highly important are tazkiyah al-nafs, which means soul purification, and dhikr, which means remembrance of God. Both ideas can help bring one closer to God. They can also assist in achieving broader mental balance and health. In mental illness therapy, the Sufi approach emphasizes balance between physical, mental, and spiritual health (Alfi Wirda Mawaddah 2024). This means therapy does not only focus on mental symptoms but also on the primary source of spiritual crises. The process of healing mental disorders is aided by Sufi

spiritual practices. This method emphasizes balance in physical, mental, and spiritual health, providing a broader way to achieve well-being.

Some effectiveness of the Sufi approach include:

1. Reduction of stress and anxiety
2. A holistic approach that can help individuals find deeper meaning and purpose in life
3. Obtaining substantial support from community or social networks
4. Integration of spiritual values. (Fitriya, Ma, and Hikam 2024)

By integrating various spiritual methods such as dhikr, meditation, night prayers, muhasabah, and regular recitation of the Qur'an, Sufi practices offer a comprehensive approach to enhancing emotional well-being (Sabiq 2016). By repeating God's names or phrases of praise, dhikr can calm the mind and provide profound inner peace. Direct experiences show that dhikr can significantly reduce anxiety and strengthen emotional connections with God, resulting in unprecedented spiritual peace. Meditation, as practiced in muraqabah and night prayers, also allows for deeper introspection, increasing awareness of Allah's presence in daily life, and better controlling negative emotions (Syauqie 2024). Muhasabah, as a self-introspection practice, helps recognize and address sources of discomfort or dissatisfaction. On the other hand, regular recitation of the Qur'an provides clear life guidance and creates space for inner peace and soul tranquility. Overall, by deepening one's spiritual relationship with God and enhancing the meaning of daily life with high spiritual values, Sufi practices greatly assist in their emotional well-being (Ilham Ramadhani Huda and Satrio Artha Priyatna 2024).

Psychotherapy uses scientific techniques to address mental issues, while

tasawuf, a spiritual teaching of Islam, focuses on soul purification and character formation. A more comprehensive healing approach can be produced by combining these two fields. Although each has a different path, both can help individuals overcome complex emotional problems.

Religion-based insight psychotherapy uses norms, religion, and moral values as guidelines and directions in patient healing. In religion-based psychotherapy, the spiritual aspect is an important component that can provide significant spiritual refreshment in improving patients' mental health (Diana Kurniati Kartika, Vivik Shofiah, and Khairunnas Rajab 2025). Psychotherapy in this form provides a clear picture of the need for a new approach, a spiritual approach that can be utilized. Human mental health is the primary goal of tasawuf-psychotherapy. In Islam, mental health is psychological emotional strength that positions humans as religious practitioners starting from ritual aspects (worship), faith (iman), and norms (akhlak) applicable in society. Being mentally healthy is inseparable from character formation. Maintaining good relations with one's God, being tolerant, forgiving, and not disturbing others are examples of good character (Suhartiningsih 2021).

Islamic psychotherapy integrates contemporary psychological ideas with Islamic values to attempt healing mental disorders in ways based on the Qur'an and Sunnah (Rosyad 2021). Research shows that Islamic psychotherapy can help individuals overcome burnout symptoms by providing spiritual and emotional strength. The goal of Islamic psychotherapy is to restore someone to their pure fitrah or to return to the straight path. Furthermore, according to Hamdani (2004:254), psychotherapy must also help someone discover the essence of themselves, their God, and God's secrets. Islamic

psychotherapy should not only handle people who are "sick" based on mental-psychological-social standards but also handle those who are "sick" morally and spiritually. Therefore, the standards used to determine whether a behavior needs therapy start with Islamic moral-spiritual values, then refer to psychological standards (Rajab, Zein, and Bardansyah 2016).

Combining tasawuf with psychotherapy can produce a more comprehensive approach to addressing burnout syndrome. Both tasawuf and psychotherapy use mental and spiritual approaches. Psychotherapy changes how people think and behave, while tasawuf helps with spiritual values that provide deeper meaning (Sri Rahayu 2019). Islamic psychotherapy is divided into two categories. The first category is worldly psychotherapy, which includes psychic treatment approaches and methods based on understanding existing psychopathology in the real world, which are the result of human efforts and are psychic therapy or treatment techniques based on human principles. Second, the concept of tasawuf and Islamic psychotherapy is otherworldly, teaching moral, spiritual, and religious values. The models of Islamic psychotherapy and tasawuf are interconnected.

Islamic psychotherapy has complex, tangible, and noble goals and functions. Islamic psychotherapy has functions of understanding, control, forecasting or forward analysis, development, education, prevention, healing and care, and purification and cleansing (Andini et al. 2021).

According to Abdul Mujib and Jusuf Mudzakir, psychotherapy in Islam can heal all aspects of modern human psychopathology, both worldly and otherworldly, as done by Ali bin Abi Thalib: reading the Qur'an while trying to understand its meaning, performing night prayers, associating with good or pious

people, increasing fasting, and long night dhikr (Mukhlis and Syahrul Munir 2023). This combination has several advantages, including:

1. Enhancement of Mental Well-being: Sufi practices, such as dhikr and prayer, can help calm the mind and reduce stress.
2. Spiritual Connectedness: Enhancing personal relationships with God can increase life's meaning, which is crucial for overcoming feelings of lost direction.
3. Holistic Approach: A more comprehensive approach to mental health emerges when psychological techniques are combined with spiritual practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tasawuf as a spiritual approach has significant effectiveness in helping individuals overcome burnout syndrome. Through spiritual practices such as dhikr, muhasabah, and tafakkur, individuals can cultivate self-awareness, inner tranquility, and a profound spiritual connection to God. The soul purification process (tazkiyatun nafs) in tasawuf helps reduce emotional pressure, strengthen life's meaning, and restore balance between an individual's mental and spiritual aspects.

The results of this literature review also indicate that Sufi values can be effectively integrated into contemporary psychotherapy, thus forming a more comprehensive (holistic) intervention model. This combined approach not only emphasizes psychological recovery but also the formation of psychospiritual resilience, namely the ability to endure, adapt, and find peace in facing life's pressures. In this way, Sufi practices can strengthen mental health while enhancing the emotional well-being of individuals experiencing burnout.

Furthermore, the application of tasawuf-based psychotherapy is considered relevant for societies with strong religious tendencies, as it aligns with Islamic values and their spiritual needs. However, to expand its effectiveness across various social and cultural contexts, further empirical research is still needed, so that this Sufi psychotherapy model can be tested more applicably and clinically.

Overall, tasawuf not only offers a spiritual solution to stress and burnout but also serves as a transformative means for individuals to achieve complete mental, emotional, and spiritual balance amidst the complexities of modern life.

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