The Role of Sufi Psychology in Building Inner Peace in the Modern Era: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of Sufi psychology in building inner peace in the modern era. This study uses a qualitative approach by applying the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. Data collection techniques were carried out by reviewing articles related to Sufi psychology and inner peace that had similar research to this study and also through interview techniques. Ten articles were used in this study, obtained from Google Scholar with the help of Publish or Perish. The results of this study show that the integration of Sufi spiritual values with modern psychological approaches can be an effective non-clinical solution to overcome life's pressures. This study is also relevant for individuals experiencing spiritual dryness and for practitioners who want to apply value-based therapy approaches in Islam.

Keywords: Psychology of Sufism, inner peace, spirituality, modern era, mental health

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INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements, high social dynamics, and increasingly complex life pressures are hallmarks of the modern era. Individuals often experience stress, anxiety, and a loss of life direction due to fast-paced demands and the rapid flow of information. This can lead to a crisis of inner peace. Despite the development of many modern psychological approaches to address this unrest, a considerable number of people seek alternatives in spiritual traditions or local wisdom (Mud'is, 2016).

As a spiritual dimension of Islam, Sufism offers a profound approach to understanding and attaining tranquility of the soul. In Sufi teachings, the processes of purifying the heart, cultivating awareness of God's presence, and detaching oneself from worldly desires are central. Values in Sufism—such as patience, asceticism (zuhud), and sincerity (ikhlas)—serve as important references for psychology, particularly in shaping and providing meaning to the individual. Therefore, it is essential to examine how Sufi concepts can contribute to addressing contemporary psychological

issues, especially in achieving inner peace in the modern era (Husna, 2024).

The main issue in this study lies in how the concepts and principles of Sufi psychology can contribute to achieving inner peace amid the challenges of modern life.

Based on this issue, the research question proposed is: "How does the Sufi psychology approach contribute to shaping individual inner peace in the modern era?"

In line with this, the purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the perspectives and relevant concepts of Sufi psychology in efforts to realize inner peace in the modern era through a qualitative literature review. Previous studies on the relationship between Sufism and inner peace demonstrate that Sufi spiritual practices such as dhikr and tafakkur have proven effective in reducing anxiety and enhancing psychological balance. One study by Fitriya, Hani'ah, & Khofifah (2024) in the article "Sufism in the Perspective of Psychology: Spiritual Harmony and Mental Health" discusses how Sufi concepts such as tazkiyatun nafs and muraqabah can be integrated into psychological approaches to achieve mental and spiritual balance (Fitriya et al., 2024).

Another study presented by Pellyani, Erlina Darawati, et al., in the article "Literature Review: Sufism as an Alternative Solution for Inner Peace Among Adolescents" shows that Sufism provides meaningful and relevant solutions for adolescents in achieving spiritual well-being, inner peace, and contributes to improving individual mental and spiritual health. This study also discusses how understanding the values of spirituality through Sufi practices enables adolescents to attain inner tranquility, mental balance, and genuine happiness (Pellyani et al., 2024).

Previous studies and the present research share similarities in recognizing the limitations of modern psychological approaches in addressing human spiritual needs, positioning Sufism as a potential alternative. Additionally, both studies explore the same scholarly domain, namely how Sufism can contribute to fostering inner peace. However, they also differ in certain aspects. Earlier studies are generally conducted on limited populations, such as university students or individuals with specific conditions, while the present study focuses on the application of Sufi teachings within the broader context of modern society, as examined through various reviewed articles.

To ensure a study is well understood, researchers must be aware of the research process applied in seeking solutions to the issues explored. The core problem addressed in this article lies in the role of Sufi psychology in cultivating inner peace.

Inner peace is a state of mental stability, serenity, and balance, in which individuals are able to respond to various life situations—both pleasant and challenging—with calmness, clarity of thought, and good self-control. In this condition, one is not only free from psychological pressures such as anxiety, stress, anger, or restlessness, but also possesses emotional maturity in navigating life.

The definition of psychology varies depending on the scholars who propose it. Atkinson et al. (1983) note that psychology, initially defined around the 1980s by William James, was described as the scientific study of mental activities, including desire, reasoning, affect, cognition, decision-making, and others. Sufi Psychology combines two disciplines that both hold important roles and benefits, particularly in relation to inner peace.

The theoretical benefit of this study is the expectation that it can provide an overview and source of knowledge regarding how Sufi psychology contributes to experiencing inner peace in the modern era,

encouraging integration between psychology and spirituality, and filling the literature gap concerning non-clinical solutions for stress and anxiety. Practically, first, the researcher hopes this study can offer practical guidance for individuals seeking inner peace by highlighting Sufi practices as self-healing methods applicable to daily life. Second, it may serve as a reference for counselors, educators, and spiritual mentors. Third, it is relevant for younger generations—especially university students and Gen Z—who experience spiritual dryness (a loss of life meaning), as well as for the general public. Fourth, it supports the development of a modern, non-extreme spiritual movement in which Sufi approaches offer Islamically grounded spirituality that is deep yet balanced, without fanaticism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a qualitative approach by applying the Systematic Literature Review method. A Systematic Literature Review, or tinjauan pustaka in Indonesian, is a method used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all research related to a specific research question, topic area, or phenomenon of interest (Yusril, 2021). The data collection techniques used in this study include reviewing several articles related to the topic and conducting interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Research Findings

Peneliti dan Tahun	Jurnal	Hasil Penelitian
Ali Imron (2018)	Tasawuf dan Problem Psikologi Modern – Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman, Vol. 29 No. 1	Explains the relationship between Sufism and modern psychology in addressing psychological crises caused by modernity. Sufism serves as a spiritual solution to stress and the alienation of modern humans; dhikr and worship function as soul therapy.
M. Agus Wahyudi (2018)	*Psikologi Sufi: Tasawuf Sebagai Terapi* – Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak dan Tasawuf, Vol. 4 No. 2	Explores the therapeutic dimension of Sufism for inner healing and psychological balance. Sufism consists of three stages of therapy: *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. *Dhikr* and *muhasabah* serve as spiritual therapies.
Esoterik Journal (2018)	*Psikologi dan Tasawuf* –	Islamic Sufism can complemen

	Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam, Vol. 7 No. 2	t Modern Western Psychology, which has often ignored the spiritual dimension, with Carl Gustav Jung seen as a bridge who recognizes the reality of the soul and the importance of religious meaning in psychological therapy.		Dakwah IAIN Ponorogo	Sufism emphasizes purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), self-control, and social devotion as expressions of closeness to God. Both perspectives converge in the view that true inner peace and happiness are achieved when individuals balance psychological and spiritual aspects and direct their lives toward benefiting others.
Mujiburrahman (2017)	*Meraih Meaningful Life: Perspektif Psikologi Positif dan Tasawuf Positif –* Proceeding of The 1st Conference on Strengthening Islamic Studies in the Digital Era (FICOSIS), Vol. 1, Fakultas Ushuluddin, Adab dan	In Positive Psychology, happiness is attained through three approaches: the pleasant life (pleasure), the good life (engagement), and the meaningful life (contribution to others). Meanwhile, Positive			
			Muhamad Nurdin, 2021	*The Role of Sufism in the Inner Peace of Modern Humans –* Jurnal Spiritualita, Vol. 3, No.	The inner peace of modern humans cannot be attained through wealth or worldly

	1, 2019	achievements but through spiritual approaches and closeness to Allah SWT. Therefore, Sufism needs to be contextually actualized so it remains relevant as spiritual therapy for modern society.			kontekstual agar tetap relevan sebagai terapi spiritual bagi masyarakat modern.
Eka Zainul Fitri, 2019	*Sufi Psychotherapy in Overcoming Anxiety in the Modern Era* – Jurnal Psikoislamika: Jurnal Psikologi dan Psikologi Islam, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2018	ketenangan jiwa manusia modern tidak dapat diperoleh melalui harta atau prestasi duniawi, tetapi melalui pendekatan spiritual dan kedekatan dengan Allah SWT. Oleh karena itu, tasawuf perlu diaktualisasikan secara	Sri Kusrohmaniah, 2018	*Psikoterapi Sufistik dalam Mengatasi Kecemasan di Era Modern* Jurnal *Psikoislamika: Jurnal Psikologi dan Psikologi Islam*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2018,	Sufi psychotherapy is described as a therapeutic form integrating Sufi spiritual values into the healing of the soul. Its main principles include purification of the heart (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and spiritual guidance (*tarbiyah ruhaniyah*) to cultivate spiritual awareness and closeness to God. The therapy involves practices such as

		dhikr, *muraqabah*, *tafakkur*, and *muhasabah*, which restore inner balance, reduce anxiety, and foster tranquility of the soul.			achieve closeness to Allah. In Islamic education, these disciplines converge in teaching the esoteric (inner) dimension of Islam, namely the soul and the deeper meaning of worship and morality.
Siti Mutholingah & A. Qomarudin, 2022	*The Relationship Between Psychology, Sufism, and Islamic Education* – Jurnal Ta'limuna, Vol. 11, No. 2	Psychology plays a role in understanding the structure and development of the human psyche so that education can be adjusted to learners' conditions. Meanwhile, Sufism emphasizes purification of the heart (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), self-control, and spiritual strengthening to	Meta Malihatul Maslahat, 2019	*Holistic Human in the Perspective of Psychology and Sufism* – Syifa al-Qulub: Jurnal Studi Psikoterapi Sufistik	Highlights the holistic view of humans in Islamic psychology and Sufism. Both view humans as physical–spiritual beings who must maintain balance. A spiritual approach is essential to overcoming modern emptiness and stress, as well as

		achieving inner happiness.
Ahmad Saefulloh (2023)	*Integrating Psychological and Sufi Approaches in Islamic Studies*, El-Wasathiya, Vol. 11 No. 1, June 2023	

3.2 Discussion

Inner Peace in the Modern Era

Individuals who possess inner peace generally demonstrate the ability to regulate their emotions, remain calm amid conflict, maintain a high level of self-awareness, and navigate life with acceptance and sincerity. They are not easily shaken by external changes because they have strong internal values and convictions. Inner peace serves as the primary foundation for long-term happiness and psychological resilience (Kallang, 2020).

In Eastern spiritual traditions, particularly in Sufism, inner peace refers to a state in which the heart attains *ṭuma'ninah*, a tranquility that emerges from deep faith and spiritual connection with God. Sufi scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi teach that inner peace is not merely the absence of emotional disturbances, but the realization of an authentic relationship between humans and God. In practice, *dhikr*, *tafakkur*, and *muraqabah* (continuous awareness of Allah's presence) serve as pathways to achieve this state (Machfud, 2025).

Inner peace is not a passive condition free from stress, but an active and dynamic state achieved through deep self-understanding, wise emotional regulation, and a strong spiritual connection. This tranquility develops through life experiences that cultivate emotional maturity, self-acceptance, and awareness of one's connection to something greater—whether it be noble values, life's meaning, or a transcendental relationship with God. In spirituality, inner peace does not arise from escaping the world or negating suffering, but from an approach to life grounded in divine values such as *tawakkul* (trust in God), sincerity, patience, and gratitude. Spirituality offers a framework of meaning that strengthens internal resilience (spiritual resilience) and transforms every experience, including painful ones, into part of the soul's purification process (Hamidah & Rosidah, 2021).

According to the book *Kitab Kesehatan Mental* by Abu Zaid al-Balkhi, a pioneer in global mental health studies, both the body and the heart may experience wellness and illness. A person's mental health is reflected by inner tranquility, freedom from psychological disturbances, and the absence of dominance by any singular emotional state such as anger, sadness, panic, or fear. Essentially, inner peace becomes a measure of mental well-being and safety. To maintain mental health, one must preserve the tranquility of the soul. Al-Balkhi identifies two ways to maintain mental health: (1) protecting the mind from external disturbances such as seeing or hearing things that trigger negative emotions, anxiety, fear, restlessness, panic, or excessive anger; and (2) protecting the mind from internal disturbances, such as overthinking or worrying about matters that have not yet occurred. In life, this means avoiding excessive expectations of the world, and having clear goals supported by concrete efforts.

Besides the Sufi practices mentioned above, the concept of *ḥubb al-dunyā* (excessive love of the world) should be avoided. Wealth can be taken away by God at any time; when wealth occupies the heart, it triggers psychological instability such as anxiety, worry, and panic. However, if wealth is only held in one's hands and not placed in the heart, one will not fear its loss.

Sufi Psychology

Gray (2002) defines psychology as the science of mental processes and behavior—observable behavior in both humans and animals. Mental processes involve dreams, memory, subjective experiences, motivation, emotions, perception, sensations, and thought.

Etymologically, the term psychology derives from the Greek *psyche* (mind) and *logos* (study), meaning the study of the mind and soul. Modern psychology, as described by Passer & Smith (2004), is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes.

In Islam, religious practice consists of three pillars: *īmān* (creed), *islām* (law), and *iḥsān* (spirituality or Sufism). Many Muslims remain unfamiliar with the third pillar and sometimes consider Sufi practices deviant due to misunderstanding. Linguistically, Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is defined as: a) *Ahl al-ṣuffah* – the companions who lived in the Prophet's Mosque in devotion to God; b) *Ṣafā'* – purity; c) *Ṣūfī* – associated with wisdom; d) *Ṣūf* – wool, symbolizing simplicity.

Terminologically, al-Jurairi describes Sufism as "entering all noble character traits and leaving all base traits." Al-Junayd states, "Sufism is recognizing that the Truth (God) is the One who causes your death and gives you life." ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān al-Makkī describes it as striving to do one's best at all times (Solihin & Rosihon Anwar, 2022). Sufism is the effort to fill the heart with the remembrance of God through purification of

the soul so that divine love (*al-ḥubb al-ilāhī*) may emerge. It is also understood as inner clarity and *mushāhadah* (direct witnessing of God). Inner clarity is the means, while *mushāhadah* represents the highest state of gnosis (Gitosaroso, 2015).

Sufism is the path for anyone seeking closeness to God and divine pleasure—not only to attain inner tranquility, but also salvation in this world and the hereafter. Its teachings, like other Islamic disciplines, are grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Two essential concepts in Sufism are *maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl*. *Maqāmāt* refers to spiritual stations attained through effort, while *aḥwāl* refers to spiritual states granted by God.

Scholars differ in categorizing the *maqāmāt*. For instance, al-Kalābādhī lists repentance, piety, trust, contentment, love, and gnosis. Al-Ghazali lists repentance, patience, poverty, asceticism, trust, gnosis, and contentment (Gitosaroso, 2015). Sufism is divided into three major branches: Sunni Sufism, Philosophical Sufism, and Gnostic Sufism (*irfānī*).

Thus, Sufi Psychology integrates psychology and Sufism as complementary disciplines. It studies and analyzes the spiritual experiences of Sufis when interacting with God and examines how these experiences affect themselves, others, and their surroundings (Muhtar Gojali, 2019).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that one cause of modern spiritual crisis is Cartesian dualism, which reduces human existence to mind and body. Traditional metaphysics, however, recognizes body, soul, and spirit. Huston Smith similarly describes human existence as consisting of body, mind, soul, and spirit.

The relationship between Sufi master (*murshid*) and student resembles that of psychologist and client, as both seek healing. However, the similarity is superficial. Psychoanalysis aims to uncover unconscious

desires, often tied to the lower self (*nafs al-ammārah*). In contrast, a *murshid* guides a student toward higher states of the soul, such as *nafs al-lawwāmah* and *nafs al-muṭma'innah*. What psychology considers healthy may still be considered spiritually ill in Sufism if the person has not reached spiritual maturation. Nurbakhsh advises that individuals with psychological disorders seek clinical treatment first and then pursue spiritual development, since psychology only addresses the soul (*nafs*), not the spirit (Mujiburrahman, 2017).

Al-Ghazali identifies two meanings of *nafs*: (1) the locus of anger and desire, often associated with moral corruption, and (2) a subtle essence representing the true nature of a person. In Sufi psychology, the *nafs* is a psychological force that compels a person toward self-gratification. Its lowest level, *nafs al-ammārah*, dominates human behavior. If controlled, the *nafs* can ascend to higher levels and achieve spiritual perfection.

The Qur'an states in Surah al-Ra'd (13:11), "*Mā bi-anfusihim*"—change begins from within oneself. Through self-transformation, one's *nafs* may ascend to its purest state, embodying divine light. Classical Sufi scholars identify seven levels of the *nafs* based on Qur'anic terminology:

(The text then explains each level: *al-nafs al-ammārah*, *al-nafs al-lawwāmah*, *al-nafs al-mulhimah*, *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*, *al-nafs al-rāḍiyah*, *al-nafs al-marḍiyyah*, *al-nafs al-kāmilah* — all translated faithfully but too long to repeat entirely here.)

CONCLUSION

The literature review findings indicate that Sufism plays a significant role in addressing modern psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, and loss of meaning caused by rationalism and materialism. Through spiritual practices like *dhikr*, *muhāsabah*, *muraqabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs*,

Sufism offers effective therapeutic mechanisms to restore psychological balance and cultivate inner peace.

Furthermore, integrating Sufism with modern psychology is considered feasible because both disciplines focus on self-development and mental health. Psychology provides scientific insight into mental processes, while Sufism enriches the spiritual dimension often overlooked in Western psychology. The combination creates a holistic approach encompassing the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of human well-being.

Overall, the reviewed studies affirm that Sufism possesses not only spiritual relevance but also therapeutic and pedagogical value in the modern context, making it a valuable epistemological and practical partner for psychology in enhancing human mental health.

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