

Strengthening the Mental Health of Adolescent Students through Sufism Psychotherapy at Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the strengthening of the mental health of adolescent students through Sufism psychotherapy at the Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. Sufism psychotherapy practices include dhikr (remembrance of God), muhasabah (self-reflection), muraqabah (spiritual awareness), and tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) as a form of spiritual development for students. The results indicate that Sufism psychotherapy helps students reduce anxiety, increase emotional calm, and strengthen emotional regulation during the adaptation process at the Islamic boarding school. Social support from religious teachers and peers also plays a role in strengthening the students' psychological resilience. Thus, Sufism psychotherapy positively contributes to strengthening the mental health of adolescent students in the Islamic boarding school environment.

Keywords: mental health, adolescent students, Sufism psychotherapy, Islamic boarding school.

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INTRODUCTION

Students' mental health and adaptation are a crucial aspect of the educational process at Islamic boarding schools, especially for junior high and vocational high school students

who are still in their early years. During this stage, students often experience emotional stress due to separation from family, a new, more disciplined environment, and a busy academic and religious schedule. This stress can lead to anxiety and decreased motivation to learn if not managed appropriately. Previous research has shown that new students tend to experience symptoms of homesickness, difficulty adapting, and require adequate psychological support (Kusumawati et al., 2024).

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, mental health development is not only carried out through modern psychological approaches but also integrates spiritual practices. Sufism, as part of the Islamic

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tradition, offers various methods of spiritual development such as dhikr (remembrance of God), self-reflection (muhasabah), prayer, and strengthening morals. These approaches have been shown to have significant therapeutic effects, such as reducing stress, fostering inner peace, and improving students' self-regulation (El Imamah et al., 2023).

The integration of Sufism into Islamic psychotherapy provides a more holistic concept of soul healing, encompassing cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and moral aspects. Through the practice of dhikr (remembrance of God) and moral development, students are guided to internalize the values of patience, gratitude, tawakkul (trust in God), and pleasure (rida), which have a significant impact on mental resilience (Nurjanah & Chodijah, 2024). Furthermore, the role of teachers, kiai (Islamic scholars), and ustadz/ustadzah (Islamic religious teachers) is crucial as they act as spiritual figures who guide students through the process of mental and moral development.

The structured environment in Islamic boarding schools, congregational worship activities, and spiritual closeness among students contribute to a strong sense of security and social support. These factors make Islamic boarding schools a potential space for the application of Sufism-based psychotherapy to strengthen students' mental health. Therefore, this study aims to describe how the Sufi psychotherapy approach is implemented at the Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School and its impact on the mental health of junior high and vocational school students.

The concept of mental health from an Islamic perspective is not only understood as a state of freedom from psychological disorders, but also encompasses a balance between an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. In Islam, mental health is related to peace of mind (nafs al-

muthmainnah), the ability to control emotions, and one's closeness to God. Individuals with good mental health tend to be able to face life's pressures with more patience, calm, and optimism. Therefore, a spiritual approach is crucial in maintaining mental health, particularly in Islamic boarding school-based educational environments that emphasize religious development in daily life (Suryatiningsih & Ansyah, 2024).

In Sufism, humans are viewed as having a soul (nafs) that requires a process of development and purification to achieve inner peace. Sufism emphasizes spiritual stages or stations such as repentance, patience, trust (Tawakal), acceptance (Rida), and sincerity (Ikhlas) as a process of controlling desires and developing morals. Through this process, individuals are expected to develop a more emotionally and spiritually stable personality. The Sufi approach is relevant in strengthening the mental health of Islamic boarding school students because Islamic boarding school life has a religious culture that consistently supports spiritual practices (Dimyathy & Hazim, 2024).

Islamic psychotherapy is a therapeutic approach that uses Islamic spiritual values as the basis for individual psychological development. This approach focuses not only on cognitive and behavioral aspects but also emphasizes the spiritual dimension as an essential part of the mental healing process. Practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God), muhasabah (reflection), muraqabah (spiritual awareness), and tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) are considered effective in helping individuals achieve inner peace, improve self-control, and reduce emotional stress. Furthermore, spiritual coping through religious activities has been shown to help adolescents deal with psychological problems more adaptively and positively, particularly in Islamic boarding school environments with

strong spiritual development systems (Zuhal, Ramli, & Atmoko, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the implementation of Sufism-based psychotherapy in strengthening the mental health of students at the Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School in Kajen. The study was conducted over three months, from October to December 2025.

The study subjects consisted of three junior high school and vocational high school students, aged 15–18. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria, including active participation in spiritual activities at the Islamic boarding school, length of stay at the boarding school, and willingness to participate in interviews.

The Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School in Kajen was chosen as the research location because it routinely implements spiritual development programs based on Sufism practices such as dhikr (remembrance of Allah), Quran reading, congregational prayer, and self-reflection (muhasabah) as part of the students' daily activities. These programs were deemed relevant to the research focus on strengthening mental health through an Islamic spiritual approach.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly with students to explore their emotional experiences, adaptation processes, and perceptions of spiritual activities within an Islamic boarding school environment.

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Next, the interview data were analyzed using open coding techniques to identify key themes related to

students' mental health, including emotional adaptation, spiritual coping, social support, and emotional challenges experienced by students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interview results indicate that junior high and vocational high school students experience a challenging emotional adaptation process during their initial stay in the Islamic boarding school. Environmental changes, strict disciplinary rules, busy schedules, and separation from family are major factors contributing to psychological stress among students. These conditions cause some students to experience sadness, homesickness, and emotional exhaustion during their stay in the Islamic boarding school.

One student said: "When I first started at the Islamic boarding school, I often cried at night because I remembered home and wanted to go back." (Student RH, 17 years old)

Another student also revealed that the busy activities in the Islamic boarding school often left her feeling physically and mentally exhausted.

"Sometimes I'm tired because I have so many activities and have to follow all the Islamic boarding school schedules." (Student SK, 18 years old).

These findings suggest that the initial phase of living in the Islamic boarding school is a vulnerable period for school students' mental health. However, the adaptation process gradually develops through peer support, introduction to spiritual activities, and a Islamic boarding school environment that makes students begin to feel more comfortable.

Furthermore, social relationships with peers are an important factor in helping students reduce emotional stress. Some students reported feeling calmer after having close friends with whom to share stories and play.

"When I'm sad, I usually talk to my roommate, and it makes me feel calmer."
(Student NL, age 15)

The results of this study indicate that social support and the religious environment in Islamic boarding schools play a significant role in fostering students' emotional adjustment.

The religious environment in Islamic boarding schools is also strengthened through the role of the religious teacher (ustadz), congregational activities, and social interactions among students in the Islamic boarding school.

The ustadz not only serves as a teacher but also as a spiritual guide, providing advice, motivation, and emotional support to students. Furthermore, congregational activities such as congregational prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), and regular religious study create an atmosphere of togetherness that helps students feel calmer and more accepted in the Islamic boarding school environment. Relationships with roommates also serve as a source of emotional support for students when they experience difficulties during the adaptation process. These positive social interactions create a supportive religious environment, enabling students to develop mental resilience, control their emotions, and build psychological comfort during their stay at the Islamic boarding school (Wijaya, Haddade, Rahman, & Afif, 2025; Nasution et al., 2024).

Emotional Adaptation of Students in the Islamic Boarding School Environment
Research findings indicate that adolescent students experience various emotional stresses during their initial stay at Islamic boarding schools, such as homesickness, anxiety, and difficulty adjusting to their new environment. This situation indicates that the adaptation process at Islamic boarding schools is a crucial phase that can impact students' mental health. In the context of developmental psychology, adolescence is a

vulnerable stage for emotional changes as individuals undergo social and psychological transitions. Therefore, the Islamic boarding school environment plays a crucial role in helping students develop skills, adapt, and mental resilience during Islamic boarding school life (Hasanah & Riyanti, 2019).

This occurs because students must adapt to a more disciplined lifestyle, limited interaction with family, and a busy schedule. However, the religious environment of Islamic boarding schools helps students develop more positive coping mechanisms through the practice of worship and spiritual activities. This aligns with research by Abdullah and Hidayati (2021), which explains that spiritual well-being has a positive relationship with psychological resilience in Islamic boarding school students. Therefore, students' emotional adaptation is influenced not only by individual factors but also by a supportive spiritual and social environment.

The Role of Dhikr, Muhasabah, Muraqabah, and Tazkiyah al-Nafs in Emotion Regulation. The research findings indicate that the practices of dhikr, muhasabah, muraqabah, and tazkiyah al-nafs contribute to improving students' emotional calm and self-control. These practices help students reduce anxiety, calm their minds, and increase self-awareness in dealing with the pressures of life at an Islamic boarding school. These findings suggest that Sufi psychotherapy functions not only as a spiritual practice but also as a therapeutic approach capable of helping stabilize the psychological well-being of adolescent students. Through the process of self-reflection and spiritual strengthening, students become better able to understand and manage their emotions more positively (Nurjanah & Chodijah, 2024).

This phenomenon occurs because Sufi practices work through a simultaneous spiritual and psychological approach. Dhikr

helps calm the heart through the repetition of spiritual phrases, while muhasabah helps students evaluate their own behavior and emotions. Muraqabah fosters an awareness that every action is under God's supervision, thus encouraging better self-control. Meanwhile, tazkiyah al-nafs helps purify the soul by controlling desires and cultivating good moral habits. According to Rahman and Ma'sum (2022), spiritual practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God) and night prayer can increase inner peace and strengthen students' mental health. Thus, integrating Sufi values into psychotherapy has a positive influence on adolescent students' emotional regulation.

The Sufi psychotherapy approach used in this study differs from modern psychological approaches, which tend to focus on cognitive and behavioral aspects. Sufi psychotherapy focuses not only on resolving emotional problems but also emphasizes the process of purifying the soul, controlling desires, and strengthening the spiritual connection with God. The practices of dhikr, muhasabah, muraqabah, and tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) help students achieve inner peace through a religious approach that is more closely aligned with everyday life in Islamic boarding schools. This demonstrates that the spiritual approach has a strong relevance to the culture and lifestyle of students, making it more readily accepted than general psychological approaches (Mursalin, 2024; Nurjanah & Chodijah, 2024).

Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools offer a unique spiritual environment that is not found in general educational institutions. Congregational life, the practice of collective worship, the closeness between ustadz (teacher) and students, and the ongoing religious culture create a psychological atmosphere that supports students' mental health. This religious environment creates a

sense of security, togetherness, and emotional support that helps students cope with psychological stress during the adaptation process. Thus, strengthening mental health in Islamic boarding schools is influenced not only by individual therapy but also by the social and spiritual systems integrated into the students' daily lives. This finding aligns with research on religiousness and the psychological well-being of Islamic boarding school students, which shows that the spiritual environment of Islamic boarding schools positively contributes to the psychological resilience of adolescent students (Suryatiningsih et al., 2024).

Social Support and Students' Psychological Resilience

Social support from religious teachers, caregivers, and peers has been shown to significantly impact students' mental health. The presence of a supportive social environment helps students feel safer, more comfortable, and accepted during their studies in Islamic boarding schools. Positive relationships between students and spiritual mentors create a positive emotional atmosphere, making it easier for students to cope with psychological stress during the adaptation process. These findings suggest that students' mental health is influenced not only by individual spiritual practices but also by the quality of social relationships within the Islamic boarding school environment (El Imamah, Istiadji, & Nur Rif'ah, 2023).

This occurs because positive social interactions foster a sense of community and emotional support among students. Collective living in Islamic boarding schools encourages students to help each other, share experiences, and provide motivation. Furthermore, the persuasive and religious approach of religious teachers helps students become more open in facing emotional challenges. According to Muttaqin et al. (2024), the balance between

spiritual guidance and social support in Islamic boarding schools can strengthen students' mental resilience and help them cope more healthily with academic and social pressures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that strengthening the mental health of junior high and vocational high school students at the Al-Furqon Islamic Boarding School is influenced by the implementation of Sufism-based psychotherapy through activities such as dhikr (remembrance of Allah), Quran reading, prayer, self-reflection, and spiritual guidance. These spiritual practices contribute to students' emotional calm, reduce feelings of anxiety and homesickness, and help them improve their emotional regulation during the adaptation process to the Islamic boarding school environment.

The findings also indicate that social support from peers and teachers plays a crucial role in supporting students' psychological well-being. Students who initially experienced emotional difficulties gradually demonstrated better emotional adaptation, increased self-confidence, and greater mental resilience after consistently participating in spiritual and social activities at the Islamic boarding school.

This study contributes academically to the development of Islamic psychology and Sufism-based psychotherapy, particularly in the context of strengthening mental health among junior high and vocational high school students at Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for Islamic boarding schools by emphasizing the importance of integrating spiritual guidance, emotional support, and mental health awareness into daily educational practices.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single

Islamic boarding school (pesantren) with a limited number of participants, so the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Second, this study used a qualitative approach that relied primarily on interviews and observations, which may be susceptible to subjective interpretation.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more participants from various Islamic boarding schools and use mixed methods or quantitative approaches to more comprehensively measure the effectiveness of Sufism-based psychotherapy. Further studies could also explore the relationship between spiritual practices and long-term psychological resilience among Islamic boarding school students in various educational settings.

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