

Sufi Dance: Spiritual Harmony for Mental Health and the Strengthening of Character Education

Dianing Pra Fitri^{1 a,1,*}, Zumrodi^{2 b,2}, Meta Malihatul Maslahat^{c,3}.

^{a,b,c} Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kudus, Kudus, Indonesia.

¹prafitridianing@uinsuku.ac.id ; ²zumrodistain@gmail.com ; ³metamaslahat@iainkudus.ac.id

*Correspondent Author : prafitridianing@uinsuku.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation and implications of Sufi dance in fostering mental health and its connection to education. The research was conducted at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Semarang, employing a qualitative field research method. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The subjects of this study were the founder of Sufi dance and five Sufi dancers who are students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Semarang. Data analysis followed the steps of data reduction, data presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Sufi dance imparts numerous positive values, nurturing the soul and enhancing spiritual development. This enhancement of mental and spiritual aspects contributes significantly to achieving mental health, as well as holistic well-being encompassing the bio-psycho-social and spiritual dimensions. Moreover, the values and teachings embedded in Sufi dance serve as a medium to strengthen character education and promote personal growth.

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Introduction

Mental health issues have consistently remained a compelling subject of scholarly inquiry, given the persistently high prevalence of mental disorders worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of mental health disorders ranges from 0.7% to 1% of the global population (Yudi Kurniawan & Indahria Sulistyarini, 2016, pp. 112–124). In 2009, the WHO reported that approximately 450 million people worldwide were experiencing mental health problems, with a prevalence rate of 10% among adults and 25% among adolescents. Data from the National Institute of Mental Health further indicate that mental disorders account for 13% of the global population and are projected to increase to 25% by 2030 (Fajar Rinawati, 2016, pp. 34–38).

This issue is often attributed to individuals' lack of attention to mental health, which is frequently perceived as less important than physical health. In fact, maintaining mental health is equally essential as maintaining physical health, as human beings constitute an integrated whole encompassing biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Hanna Djumhana Bastaman, 2011, p. 49).

Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between mental and physical health. When an individual's mental state is well maintained, their physical condition tends to be healthier, and vice versa. Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, many individuals

have experienced psychological disturbances such as anxiety, stress, depression, and social isolation, which have contributed to a decline in immune function (Ilham Akhsanu Ridlo, 2020, pp. 155–164). Therefore, maintaining a balance between mental and physical health has become increasingly important.

In Islam, one approach to maintaining mental health is strengthening the spiritual dimension through the teachings of *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). *Tasawwuf* encourages individuals to return to Allah with contentment, sincerity, and gratitude. One Sufi practice that plays a significant role in enhancing mental well-being is the Sufi dance. This dance functions not only as a medium of worship and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) but also as a means of relaxation and emotional regulation. The Sufi dance was first introduced by Jalaluddin Rumi, a Turkish Sufi, who employed art as a medium for drawing closer to Allah SWT (Choiriyah, 2009, p. 4).

According to Safran Rusmalla and Setya Widyawati, Sufi dance represents an expression of a servant's love for God. This practice assists individuals in recognizing their own impermanence and experiencing the presence of Allah in a profound manner, thereby fostering inner peace and strengthening mental resilience (Safran Rusmalla & Setya Widyawati, 2019, pp. 171–179). Consequently, Sufi dance serves as a medium that not only enhances mental health but also strengthens character education through spiritual development.

Based on the background outlined above, this study aims to comprehensively examine how the implementation of Sufi dance contributes to maintaining mental health and strengthening character education. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah, Meteseh, Tembalang District, Semarang Regency, which is recognized as the first institution in which Sufi dance was formally taught by Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, the founder of Sufi dance in the Indonesian archipelago.

This study employed a qualitative approach using field research methods. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects included one founder of Sufi dance and five *santri* (students) or Sufi dancers at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, data verification, and conclusion drawing.

This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Sufi dance functions not only as a medium for spiritual development but also as an approach to maintaining mental health and strengthening the values of character education.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach. According to Sugiyono (2019:65), the quantitative approach is a method based on positivism philosophy, which examines populations through data collection using research instruments, and the data processing is conducted statistically to test hypotheses. The type of research used is causal research, which aims to test theories, measure variables, and identify relationships or cause-and-effect among variables. The population in this study consisted of teachers and educational personnel from 25 elementary schools in Bodeh District, Pemalang Regency, totaling 243 individuals. The sample size of this study was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 150 individuals. The data collection method used in this research was a questionnaire. The sampling frame in this study consisted of the official list of active teachers and education personnel at elementary schools in Bodeh District, Pemalang Regency, for the 2024/2025 academic year, which was obtained directly from the administrative records of each school and verified through coordination with school principals to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Result

Spiritual Harmonization Through Sufi Dance

Sufi dance was initially introduced by Jalaluddin Rumi in the thirteenth century. This dance incorporates elements of *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *tafakkur* or *muhasabah* (self-reflection), as well as relaxation. Through this practice, dancers are expected to cultivate spiritual purity of the soul and heart, thereby achieving mental well-being and a closer relationship with God. Prior to performing the dance, participants typically engage in preparatory practices such as *dhikr* and supplication. In its performance, the dance is accompanied by distinctive Middle Eastern music, such as *hadrah* rhythms and *Burdah* chants. In Western contexts, this dance is more commonly known as the “Whirling Dervishes,” whereas in Indonesia, Jalaluddin Rumi’s *sema* dance is more widely recognized as Sufi dance (Abdul Muhaya, 2003, pp. 95–97).

Sufi dance—also known as the Whirling Dervishes or *Samāʿ*—constitutes a form of expression through which a servant longs for closeness to God. During the performance of Sufi dance, individuals may experience a state of *fanāʿ* (self-annihilation), in which only God (*baqāʿ*) remains. Experiencing *fanāʿ* contributes to the negation of egocentrism within the self, which in turn positively influences inner tranquility and psychological serenity (Zainal Fanani, 2011, p. 26).

A similar perspective is articulated by Annemarie Schimmel, who asserts that Sufi dance represents a path through which a longing soul ascends toward the summit where the Beloved awaits (Annemarie Schimmel, 2016, p. 258). The music and movements involved in the dance constitute a form of worship devoted solely to Allah SWT (Annemarie Schimmel, 2000, p. 228). Nuraini A. Manan likewise argues that Sufi dance is a religious activity capable of filling both soul and body with happiness and peace, as it serves as a means of drawing closer to Allah (Nuraini A. Manan, 2012, p. 258). This Sufi dance fosters inner peace because its performance involves the chanting of *dhikr* (Abdul Muhaya, 2003, pp. 95–97).

When an individual engages in *dhikr* (the remembrance of God), their inner state becomes tranquil and they experience a sense of closeness to Allah (Mukhtar Solihin, 2004, pp. 30–81). This is affirmed in the Qur’an, Surah *ar-Raʿd* (13:28), in which Allah declares:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

“Those who believe and whose hearts find tranquility in the remembrance of Allah. Truly, it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find tranquility.” (Qur’an, Surah *ar-Raʿd* [13]:28).

Based on the above Qur’anic verse, it can be understood that *dhikr*, or the remembrance of Allah, has a calming effect on an individual’s inner state. In relation to this verse, it may be inferred that through Sufi dance, individuals are likewise able to attain inner tranquility, and such inner peace signifies the achievement of sound mental health. Accordingly, Sufi dance may function as a medium for healing mental distress, preventing mental disorders, and fostering sustained mental well-being characterized by calmness and serenity (Safran Rusmalla & Setya Widayawati, 2019, pp. 171–179).

This argument is further reinforced by Husain Muhammad, who explains that Sufi dance creates an atmosphere of religiosity that enables dancers to release emotional burdens and worldly thoughts, allowing their souls to be immersed in love and longing for God (Husain Muhammad, 2012, pp. 79–80).

According to Abdul Muhaya, Sufi dance is a form of spiritual dance that enables its performers to experience profound joy as they are liberated from worldly concerns. Moreover, Sufi dance is believed to cleanse inner impurities, soothe the soul, and strengthen spiritual illumination (Abdul Muhaya, 2003, pp. 95–97). Abdul Hadi further asserts that Sufi dance can

lead individuals from spiritual darkness toward spiritual joy, thereby fostering inner peace, happiness, and a deep sense of longing for Allah. In addition, Sufi dance is said to enhance an individual's potential across spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions (Abdul Hadi WM, 2009, pp. 55–57).

A similar view is expressed by Falahul Mualim Yusuf, who describes Sufi dance as a form of meditation with numerous benefits, one of which is the healing of inner spiritual ailments (Falahul Mualim Yusuf, 2017, pp. 65–66). This meditative aspect of Sufi dance is also associated with the experience of union with God (William C. Chittick, 2000, p. 10).

According to Ibn al-Hujwiri, the practice of Sufi dance is governed by several prescribed conditions. First, a *shaykh* must be present during the performance. Second, the venue should be free from the presence of laypersons. Third, the vocalist or chanter should be a respected individual. Fourth, the practitioner must empty the heart of worldly thoughts. Fifth, participants should not exceed reasonable limits but instead maintain moderation throughout the performance. Sixth, they should be capable of understanding invocations oriented toward ecstatic experience. Seventh, they should refrain from interacting with anyone involved, focusing solely on contemplation of Allah. Eighth, the intention to concentrate must arise from within the individual and not be influenced by others (Ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri, 2003, p. 492).

Abdul Muhaya similarly outlines several essential aspects that must be observed in the performance of Sufi dance, including the presence of pure intention, an inner state free from worldly desires, a sacred and dignified setting, and a sincere aspiration to draw closer to Allah SWT. Furthermore, Abdul Muhaya notes that the most appropriate time to perform Sufi dance is during communal gatherings held for the purpose of seeking the pleasure of Allah SWT, accompanied by other acts of worship such as *dhikr* and *wirid* (Abdul Muhaya, 2003, pp. 75–77).

Sufi dance embodies distinctive philosophical symbolism. For instance, when the *dervishes* change their black cloaks into white garments, this act signifies death and resurrection after death. The conical felt hat (*sikke*) worn by the dancers symbolizes a tombstone, while the reed flute (*ney*) represents the trumpet blown by the angel on the Day of Resurrection. During the ritual, the dancers invoke the Divine Name while bowing, then inhale and rise again. As they spin, the dancers keep their right palms facing upward to receive Divine grace and their left palms facing downward to transmit Divine energy to the earth through the heart. The ritual includes several recitations, such as the *adhan*, *wirid*, *dhikr*, *rawātib* (sacred chants), musical accompaniment, and the recitation of religious poetry. In this state, the dancers experience mystical ecstasy (Muhammad Zainal Haq, 2011, pp. 85–87).

According to Nasaruddin Umar, Sufi dance offers several benefits and functions. First, it helps soften hardened souls and promotes mental well-being. Through listening to and deeply engaging with specific musical instruments, songs, and rhythms, individuals are encouraged to develop emotional maturity and gentleness of character. Sufi dance also assists in correcting distorted thinking patterns and purifying an impure heart. Second, Sufi dance serves as a means of lifting spiritual veils resulting from excessive distance from God. Uncontrolled arrogance arising from hardened hearts and minds is gradually dissolved, thereby expanding one's awareness of God through the chanting of poetry, melodies, and rhythms within the dance. Third, internalizing Sufi dance guides individuals to reconnect with the primordial spiritual commitment once declared before Allah SWT—namely, the affirmation of God as their Lord. Fourth, Sufi dance is capable of profoundly touching the inner self, leading to inner peace and serenity (Nasaruddin Umar, 2020, pp. 126–130).

Keren Harel also asserts that Sufi dance offers numerous benefits beyond enhancing spirituality, extending to psychological, sociological, and biological dimensions. In terms of spirituality, individuals experience a sense of closeness and union with God. Psychologically, participants develop positive emotional states, effective self-regulation, and enhanced concentration. Socially, Sufi dancers demonstrate improved adaptability and interaction with

their surrounding environment, exhibiting empathetic and altruistic attitudes—prioritizing the interests of others over personal interests. Biologically, Sufi dancers tend to maintain physical well-being and are less susceptible to various head-related ailments such as vertigo, migraines, dizziness, and similar conditions (Keren Harel, 2021, pp. 1–9).

In addition to the perspectives above, Jalaluddin Rumi emphasized that Sufi dance serves as a medium for drawing closer to Allah, as it incorporates elements of *dhikr* and supplication (*du'ā'*) (Jalaluddin Rumi, 1996, p. 313). The whirling motion of the dance facilitates and sustains concentration in the remembrance of God, enabling dancers to avoid dizziness regardless of the duration of the performance (Ahmad Saifuddin, 2001, p. 270). From a psychological standpoint, individuals who engage in the remembrance of Allah attain inner tranquility, as their inner selves become enveloped by the Divine Names and Attributes of Allah (Hanna Djumhana Bastaman, 2011, p. 161).

Through Sufi dance, individuals experience a sense of closeness to the Divine, which fosters inner calm and alleviates feelings of loneliness. This state of tranquility indicates a condition of sound mental health. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sufi dance has been recognized by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) as a form of art possessing a noble and invaluable tradition (Iqbal M. Ambara, 2010, p. 107). Beyond its artistic dimension, Sufi dance also serves as a medium for drawing closer to Allah; and when individuals attain such closeness, they experience inner peace and mental well-being (Mukhtar Solihin, 2004, pp. 30–81).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as cited by Dumilah Ayuningtyas, mental health is a state of well-being in which individuals realize their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Dumilah Ayuningtyas, 2018, pp. 1–10). Zakiah Daradjat defines mental health as the absence of mental disorders or illnesses. Mental health also refers to an individual's capacity to adapt to life changes, understand and develop personal potential, and consistently contribute positively to their surrounding environment (Zakiah Daradjat, 2016, pp. 10–66).

The characteristics of individuals with sound mental health include, first, freedom from mental disorders or psychological illnesses. Second, the ability to adapt to the environment and establish positive interpersonal relationships. Third, the capacity to develop personal potentials—such as talents, attitudes, and abilities—toward positive growth that benefits others (Baidi Bukhori, 2006, pp. 93–105).

From an Islamic perspective, individuals with sound mental health are likened to those who possess a tranquil soul (*nafs muṭma'innah*) (Abdul Mujib & Jusuf Mudzakir, 2001, pp. 133–149). Such individuals are characterized by inner calm, productivity in daily activities, acceptance of themselves and others, self-care and self-regulation, responsibility, noble character, the ability to affiliate with others, realistic aspirations, and a sense of happiness and gratitude for all blessings bestowed by Allah (Muhammad Mahmud Mahmud, 1984, pp. 342–349).

Abdul Mujib and Jusuf Mudzakir further propose several indicators of sound mental health. First, an individual's ability to confront life challenges and adapt to changing circumstances, accompanied by reliance (*tawakkul*) on Allah SWT during times of hardship. Second, the capacity for patience in facing increasingly complex life difficulties. Third, a consistent attitude of optimism and a positive outlook in navigating life's experiences (Abdul Mujib & Jusuf Mudzakir, 2001, p. 139).

This perspective is further reinforced by Hamdani Bakran Adz-Dzaky, who argues that individuals with sound mental health possess a tranquil soul, a soul that is content (*riḍā*) and divinely accepted by Allah SWT. A tranquil soul (*nafs muṭma'innah*) is one that consistently guides individuals toward their divine nature (*fiṭrah ilāhiyyah*). Meanwhile, a content soul (*nafs rāḍiyah*) is characterized by sincerity and openness toward Allah SWT. Individuals who embody this state demonstrate sincerity (*ikhhlās*), reliance (*tawakkul*), and patience (*ṣabr*) in

fulfilling divine commandments, avoiding prohibitions, and willingly accepting trials encountered in life. Furthermore, a soul that is divinely accepted (*nafs mardhiyyah*) is marked by a persistent enthusiasm for virtuous deeds and is deeply loved by Allah (Hamdani Bakran Adz-Dzaky, 2001, p. 335).

According to Nurbakhsy, the characteristics of individuals with sound mental health include sincerity in devotion, strong faith in Allah, patience in confronting life's challenges, and consistent acceptance (*riḍā*) of divine decree (Javad Nurbakhsy, 2008, pp. 73–115). This view is further supported by Sachiko Murata, who contends that individuals who have attained sound mental health experience profound inner tranquility. Such tranquility leads to a state of complete surrender, submission, and total devotion to God. Murata explains that those who fully entrust their lives to God have attained genuine *tawḥīd* and a deep understanding of the true meaning of life. Consequently, individuals who possess inner peace and sound mental health are less susceptible to psychological disturbances (Sachiko Murata, 2000, pp. 327–372).

Several factors may influence an individual's mental health, broadly categorized into internal and external factors. According to Zakiah Daradjat, internal factors affecting mental health include an individual's faith (*īmān*) and piety (*taqwā*) toward Allah. These factors play a crucial role in attaining inner tranquility, as individuals who believe that Allah governs their lives and provides solutions to all life's challenges tend to maintain a positive outlook when facing adversity. This perspective is reflected in the Qur'an, Surah *At-Ṭalāq* (65:2–3), which states:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا

"And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make for them a way out and provide for them from where they do not expect. And whoever places their trust in Allah, He is sufficient for them. Indeed, Allah is decisive in His command, and He has determined all things." (Qur'an, Surah *At-Ṭalāq* [65]:2–3).

Based on the verse above, it can be understood that faith and piety toward Allah constitute primary factors in attaining mental well-being and in facilitating the resolution of life's challenges. In addition to the internal factors discussed above, external factors also influence an individual's mental health, including environmental or social conditions, education, economic circumstances, and other contextual elements. Factors external to the individual may affect inner tranquility and mental health, as an unsafe or unstable environment can disrupt psychological well-being. Nevertheless, the fundamental determinant of inner peace and mental health remains the internal factor originating from within the individual. When a person possesses strong inner resilience or a high level of spirituality, they are more likely to maintain inner calm, psychological well-being, and stability, regardless of the adversities they encounter in life (Zakiah Daradjat, 1982b, p. 52).

Spiritual Harmonization with Mental Health and the Strengthening of Character Education through Sufi Dance

In the process of performing Sufi dance, practitioners consistently observe *adab* (ethical conduct). The *adab* practiced prior to the dance symbolizes the dancers' humility (*tawāḍu'*) before the Creator. For instance, before engaging in Sufi dance, performers are required to be in a state of purity. This state of purity does not merely pertain to physical cleanliness but places greater emphasis on inner purification. The inner self must be continually cleansed, as Allah, who is Most Pure, may only be approached through a purified heart. This principle is affirmed by Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, who states that the process of purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) constitutes the initial step toward closeness to the Creator (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022). These field findings are further supported by Abdul Muhaya, who asserts that one of the prerequisites for performing Sufi dance is self-purification. Muhaya emphasizes that self-purification entails

liberating the soul from tyrannical impulses (*nafs ammārah*) and guiding it toward a more noble state (*nafs muṭma'innah*) (Abdul Muhaya, 2003, pp. 75–77).

Beyond its role in maintaining mental health, Sufi dance also holds significant potential for the development of character education. Through the practice of this dance, individuals are cultivated in values such as religiosity, ethical conduct, gratitude, perseverance, patience, and humility. In this context, a *dervish* (Sufi dancer) does not merely engage in physical rotation but participates in a deeply meaningful process that contributes to character formation. The character values embedded in Sufi dance include the relinquishment of ego, self-control, self-sacrifice, humility, and unconditional love. When integrated into character education, these values may contribute to shaping individuals who are wiser, gentle in disposition, compassionate, and committed to fostering harmony within themselves and in society.

Accordingly, it can be understood that the initial stage in the practice of Sufi dance is self-purification. Through this process, individuals learn to release desires and ego that often function as veils (*ḥijāb*) separating them from God. These human desires and ego frequently become the primary barriers preventing individuals from attaining closeness to Allah.

Consequently, Sufi dance can be applied across various contexts of individual character education, as it instills essential moral values such as discipline, respect, compassion, and self-control. Moreover, this dance serves as a medium for fostering a sense of togetherness and enhancing empathy among individuals.

This view is also articulated by Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, who explains that individuals whose hearts remain dominated by materialistic desires often encounter difficulties in practicing Sufi dance. Such difficulties arise because their hearts remain impure and veiled (*ḥijāb*) in the remembrance of Allah. Therefore, prior to performing Sufi dance, individuals must be able to empty their inner selves of all elements that hinder the remembrance of Allah, a state referred to as *fanā'*. Only those who attain this state of *fanā'* are able to experience the beauty and spiritual delight of the whirling Sufi dance (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono's perspective is further reinforced by Zainal Fanani, who asserts that when egocentrism and materialistic desires are dissolved (*fanā'*), what remains (*baqā'*) within the heart is solely Allah. When Allah alone abides within the heart, inner tranquility naturally emerges. This inner tranquility constitutes the key foundation of the Sufi dance ritual, enabling dancers to whirl without experiencing dizziness during the performance (Muhammad Zainal Haq, 2011, p. 26).

Following the process of purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), the subsequent stage involves the performance of Sufi dance itself. During this phase, practitioners continue to observe *adab* (ethical conduct). As explained by Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, Sufi dancers begin by kissing the Sufi robe while reciting the testimony of faith (*shahādah*) to Allah and His Messenger. This ritual serves to reaffirm *tawḥīd*, the oneness of Allah, signifying that Allah alone is absolute, while all other entities are relative. The ritual is then followed by *tawassul*, a spiritual connection of the heart to the Prophet Muhammad and the saints (*awliyā' Allāh*). The crossing of the palms symbolizes the recognition that human beings are not the sole existence on earth and signifies humility (*tawāḍu'*) before Allah. This gesture reflects the awareness that only Allah is the Most Great, whereas humans are created beings characterized by limitation and imperfection (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

The next stage is the dancing phase itself. In the process of performing Sufi dance, dancers whirl with their right hand raised upward and their left hand facing downward. This movement embodies a profound aesthetic and philosophical value, symbolizing that a servant who longs for God will never grow weary in seeking Him. Such longing is accompanied by a deep hope for an eventual encounter with the Divine. This hope is further expressed through supplication, asking God to grant assistance, compassion, mercy, and blessings so that, when one becomes a chosen individual, one may transmit divine grace and love to the universe.

According to Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, this movement signifies that Sufi dancers are expected to generate benefit and positive contributions for others (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022). Thus, it may be analytically understood that through Sufi dance, practitioners are not only cultivating individual piety but also developing social piety.

Furthermore, during the performance, Sufi dancers typically focus their gaze on a single point—specifically the left thumb—while continuously engaging in silent *dhikr*. The philosophical meaning of focusing on this single point is to maintain concentration and mindfulness. As the whirling motion is repeatedly performed, the dancers internally recite *dhikr*, particularly the phrase “*Lā ilāha illā Allāh.*” This remembrance functions to negate the ego within the dancer, as ego often serves as a veil (*hijāb*) separating the individual from Allah. When the dancer reaches a state of *fanā’* (self-annihilation), only Allah remains present within the heart. This condition explains why Sufi dancers do not experience dizziness or nausea while whirling, as their souls are filled with love for Allah (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

This explanation is corroborated by a Sufi dancer at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah, who stated that during the dance, *dhikr* is continuously recited inwardly and is often accompanied by Islamic songs or music. Islamic musical forms such as *hadrah* contribute to a deeper sense of calm, while *gambus* music enhances enthusiasm during the dance. In addition to these forms, instrumental flute music frequently accompanies the Sufi dance ritual. This type of instrumental music stimulates spiritual awareness (*awareness*) of Allah, leading dancers to experience inner peace as their hearts feel increasingly close to the Divine (Interview with CH, Sufi dancer at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah, Semarang, Thursday, 9 June 2022).

In response to the above description, Muhammad Zainal Haq similarly argues that in the practice of Sufi dance, dancers not only perform the whirling movements but also engage in internal *dhikr*. The performance is typically accompanied by Islamic music and, at times, religious poetry or verses. The purpose of both the *dhikr* and the musical accompaniment is to awaken and intensify love for Allah. This love for Allah leads dancers to experience *fanā’*, through which the soul attains *baqā’*—a state of union with the Divine (Muhammad Zainal Haq, 2011, pp. 85–87).

After completing the sequence of movements, Sufi dancers conclude the ritual by returning to the initial posture of *adab*, crossing their arms over the chest. Once the music ceases, they bow again as an expression of *ta’zīm* (reverence) toward Allah and the spiritual guide (*murshid*). The completion of this gesture signifies the conclusion of the Sufi dance ritual (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

Based on the discussion above, it can be understood that Sufi dance does not merely possess aesthetic value but also embodies acts of worship capable of activating an individual’s spirituality and fostering closeness to God. This conclusion is further reinforced by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which recognizes that Sufi dance not only holds artistic and aesthetic value but also carries noble spiritual significance by guiding individuals toward deeper closeness with Allah (Iqbal M. Ambara, 2010, p. 107).

As elaborated above, Sufi dance is not merely an artistic or aesthetic performance but a form of worship with profound spiritual value that facilitates closeness to God. In addition to its role in fostering spiritual intimacy, Sufi dance also offers numerous benefits related to character education, including:

First, Sufi dance contributes significantly to the development of positive behavior, proper conduct (*adab*), ethics, and noble character (*akhlaq karimah*) among its practitioners. As conveyed by Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, engaging in Sufi dance motivates him to continuously spread virtue and provide positive contributions to the surrounding environment (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022). This strong moral enthusiasm (*ghirah*) to perform good deeds arises because Sufi dance disciplines the

soul through constant attention to adab and ethical conduct during its practice. The habitual cultivation of ethics within the ritual context subsequently influences the dancers' daily lives, encouraging them to consistently embody positive behavior. Consequently, wherever they go, Sufi dancers often become *uswatun ḥasanah* (moral exemplars) within their communities.

Sufi dance, also known as whirling dervish, is not merely a captivating performing art but possesses a profound spiritual dimension that offers substantial benefits for mental health and character education. In an increasingly fast-paced and challenging modern world, Sufi dance provides a pathway toward inner calm and peace while simultaneously fostering a strong moral foundation. Therefore, Sufi dance may serve as an alternative approach for individuals seeking to deepen their spiritual relationship with God while improving mental well-being and strengthening character education.

This analysis is further supported by Abdul Muhaya (2003, pp. 95–97), Abdul Hadi WM (2009, pp. 55–57), and Nuraini A. Manan (2012, p. 258), who argue that Sufi dance guides individuals toward becoming morally superior and virtuous personalities due to the purification of the heart from spiritual impurities. Similarly, Keren Harel (2021, pp. 1–9) asserts that Sufi dancers consistently strive to embody empathy, altruism, and benevolence toward their environment. Such positive behavior emerges because the *dhikr* embedded in Sufi dance softens and purifies the heart, enabling practitioners to manifest (*tajallī*) the divine names and attributes of Allah in their everyday lives.

Second, Sufi dance plays a crucial role in reducing negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors among its practitioners. One Sufi dancer at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah revealed that prior to joining the Sufi dance community, his life was dominated by anxiety, restlessness, and deep uncertainty regarding his future (Interview with SS, Sunday, 22 May 2022). Another dancer expressed similar experiences, describing persistent insecurity, feelings of meaninglessness, lack of motivation, negative thinking, and emotional instability before participating in Sufi dance (Interview with CH, Thursday, 9 June 2022). After joining the Sufi dance community under the guidance of Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono, both dancers reported significant transformations across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. Cognitively, they became more capable of thinking calmly and clearly when facing life challenges. Emotionally, they developed better emotional regulation, particularly in managing anxiety and worry about the future. Behaviorally, they became more disciplined in distinguishing between constructive and destructive actions and demonstrated increased motivation to remain productive in daily activities.

Kyai Amin Maulana Budi Harjono himself emphasized that Sufi dance enables effective control over egocentrism or *nafs ammārah*, which previously functioned as a spiritual veil (*ḥijāb*) obstructing closeness to Allah. He further stated that he no longer perceives life as a source of suffering or hardship but rather as a divine gift to be appreciated, enjoyed, and contemplated throughout its journey. In everyday life, he feels spiritually driven to perform positive actions for the surrounding community, viewing such actions as a form of devotion and service to God (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

The transformations experienced by Sufi dancers in cognition, emotion, and behavior stem from the negation of egocentrism (*nafs ammārah*). When egocentric impulses are relinquished, divine manifestation (*tajallī*) emerges within the heart, allowing practitioners to embody divine morality (*takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh*) and divine attributes (*takhalluq bi asmā' wa ṣifāt Allāh*).

Supporting this perspective, Safran Rusmalla and Setya Widyawati (2019, pp. 171–179) argue that Sufi dance functions as a medium for dissolving egocentrism. When the soul is emptied of tyrannical desires, the heart becomes illuminated by divine guidance, leading thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward positivity and blessing. Likewise, Husein Muhammad (2012, pp. 79–80) maintains that Sufi dance helps alleviate psychological distress due to its integration of worship practices such as *dhikr*, contemplation (*tafakkur*), and self-

reflection (muḥāsabah), all of which activate love for Allah. This divine love fosters inner peace, emotional stability, and protection from negative psychological states.

Nasaruddin Umar (2020, pp. 126–130) further emphasizes that Sufi dance cleanses and softens the heart, cultivating a state of qalbun salīm (a sound and healthy heart). In such a condition, individuals develop clarity of thought, positive thinking, emotional regulation, and wisdom in responding to life circumstances. According to Umar, these positive effects arise from the religious atmosphere inherent in Sufi dance, which combines dhikr, Islamic music, devotional poetry, and deep spiritual immersion—elements that collectively nurture emotional refinement and spiritual health.

Third, Sufi dance serves as a medium for enhancing holistic health across bio-psycho-socio-spiritual dimensions. Biologically, Kyai Amin reported feeling physically lighter, healthier, and more energetic after performing Sufi dance, enabling greater productivity and creativity. Psychologically, he noted improved emotional management, particularly regarding anxiety, sadness, anger, and restlessness. Socially, he experienced a persistent inclination to express compassion, benevolence, and service toward others, embodying the principle of raḥmatan lil ‘ālamīn. Spiritually, he felt continuously enveloped by divine love from Allah SWT (Interview with Kyai Maulana Budi Harjono, Saturday, 11 June 2022).

These findings align with Keren Harel’s (2021, pp. 1–9) assertion that Sufi dance enhances biological, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Moreover, Sufi dance can function as an alternative therapeutic approach for addressing psychological distress. One dancer at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ishlah stated that existential confusion and difficulty finding life direction significantly diminished after joining the Sufi dance community (Interview with SS, Sunday, 22 May 2022). Similarly, issues such as low self-confidence, social withdrawal, and perceived distance from God were alleviated through consistent engagement in Sufi dance (Interview with CH, Thursday, 9 June 2022).

Safran Rusmalla and Setya Widyawati (2019, pp. 171–179) further conclude that Sufi dance can heal psychological disorders, prevent mental illness, and foster enduring mental tranquility. Supporting this view, Falahul Mualim Yusuf (2017, pp. 65–66) characterizes Sufi dance as a form of meditative practice with extensive benefits, including the healing of emotional and mental ailments.

Based on the various benefits and positive impacts experienced by Sufi dancers as discussed above, it can be concluded that they can be categorized as individuals with healthy mental conditions. This conclusion is grounded in several key considerations. **First**, Sufi dancers experience a significant improvement in behavior, ethics, *adab*, and moral character, enabling them to become well-developed individuals who are capable of optimizing their personal potential. **Second**, Sufi dancers report the negation or reduction of negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, allowing them to remain productive and constructive in their daily activities. **Third**, Sufi dancers perceive themselves as healthier across biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. In addition, they feel less burdened by life problems, while their inner lives are consistently characterized by calmness, peace, happiness, meaningfulness, and well-being. These cumulative experiences form the basis for concluding that Sufi dancers embody the characteristics of individuals with healthy mental states.

The enhancement of spirituality through Sufi dance—integrating *dhikr* with aesthetic movement—enables practitioners to attain not only mental health but also holistic health encompassing biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Biologically, Sufi dancers tend to experience physical vitality, resilience, and sustained energy. Psychologically, they attain inner peace, emotional stability, and protection from psychological distress. Socially, Sufi dancers are inclined to express benevolence, service, compassion, and altruism toward their communities. Spiritually, they experience an overwhelming sense of divine love, leading to a state of *baqā’*—a profound awareness of closeness and unity with God.

Furthermore, Sufi dance offers an inner pathway to peace while simultaneously strengthening moral and character foundations. Therefore, Sufi dance may be positioned as an alternative spiritual-educational approach for individuals seeking to deepen their relationship with God, enhance mental health, and cultivate strong character values. In an era marked by psychological pressure and moral challenges, Sufi dance emerges as a holistic practice that integrates spirituality, mental well-being, and character education in a harmonious and meaningful way.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Sufi dance is an aesthetic art form that embodies profound values and meanings capable of nurturing the human soul toward personal refinement and moral development. The practice of Sufi dance exerts a positive influence on mental well-being and contributes to holistic health, encompassing biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Beyond its role in maintaining mental health, Sufi dance possesses significant potential in fostering individual character education. Through this practice, individuals are introduced to core values such as sincerity, compassion, patience, humility, and selfless love. When integrated into character education, these values can facilitate the formation of wiser, more patient, and compassionate individuals. Consequently, Sufi dance serves as an effective medium for strengthening character education, positively influencing moral development and enhancing awareness of universal values oriented toward goodness and harmony.

This research employed a qualitative approach with an emphasis on in-depth exploration and description. Therefore, future studies are recommended to adopt quantitative methodologies to obtain more empirically measurable results. Such approaches may further reinforce the theoretical framework developed in this study and provide broader insights into the benefits of Sufi dance for mental health and character education

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