

## Research Article

## Using Islamic Meditation Tradition “Suluk” Model for Mental Health

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## ABSTRACT:

Islamic meditation tradition (*Suluk*) has been practiced in religiosity context, but it is rarely used as research object in Health and Psychology Sciences. Many efforts and practices of psychology therapy have been done to have energies and well-being, nonetheless, the Islamic Meditation Tradition seldom discussed. This research was conducted to find the degree of the relationship between the practice of *suluk*, religiosity, management of the six basic energies and psychological well-being among the *saliks* practicing *suluk* at *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* and those who are *non-saliks*. This research applied the mixed method of quantitative method and qualitative method. The study findings from the qualitative analysis are as follows. The practice of *suluk* is significantly related to the psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks* ( $\beta = .765$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and all its aspects, that is, autonomy ( $\beta = .751$ ;  $p < .01$ ), control of environment ( $\beta = .525$ ;  $p < .01$ ), personal growth ( $\beta = .520$ ;  $p < .01$ ), positive relationship with others ( $\beta = .598$ ;  $p < .01$ ), purpose in life ( $\beta = .744$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and self-acceptance ( $\beta = .687$ ;  $p < .01$ ). First, the *saliks* and *non-saliks* have intrinsic religiosity. Second, the management of physical energy has constructive as well as destructive effects on *saliks* and *non-saliks*. Then, the management of the instinctive energy, intellectual energy, emotional energy and transcendental energy have constructive effects on them. Meanwhile, the management of spiritual energy has constructive effects on the *saliks*, but has constructive as well as destructive effects on the *non-saliks*. Third, all aspects of psychological well-being have positive effects on the *saliks*, but have positive and negative influences on the *non-saliks*.

**Key words:** *suluk*; religiosity; management of the six basic energies; psychological well-being.

## INTRODUCTION

The way of people practicing *suluk* (Spiritual Meditation in Islam) is seldom used as object of study in Psychology and Health Sciences. The tradition of *Suluk* Meditation has many types of processions that more or less give influential power or energy on the mental religiosity and psychology of well being. Maltby, Lewis, and Day argued that there is a positive relationship between people who pray and their subjective well-being<sup>[1]</sup>. The relationship between ritual praying and deep devotion in meditative prayers, frequency of praying, and experience in praying are all correlated with subjective well-being. Those who perform prayers, feel the presence of Allah, and remember Him, recite their prayers accordingly, will feel deeply secure, and will feel a deep experience with Allah. They reported that they can feel a better subjective well-being. Scully at all reported that religion has a large and significant influence on health and psychological well-being, especially the influence from religious organization<sup>[2]</sup>. In practice, the *Suluk* fellows manage everything that related to their religiosity and affect their psychological well-being. Religiosity or religiousness is a multidimensional construct that has diverse cognition, emotional and behavioural aspects in searching for holiness, which can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions.

The study reveals that the religiosity is a religious behaviour,

which is motivated to attain solace in the social environment, to fulfil personal needs, such that everything will be developed according to the personality of the individual concerned<sup>[3]</sup>. Miller and Kelley contended that the religious intrinsic motivation is the confidence and religious practices that are based upon personal motivation and sincerity in performing religious activities<sup>[4]</sup>.

Furthermore, the methodology of the Six Basic Energy has been studied by Suryanto and found that people are actually originated from the construct of six basic energies, namely physical, instinctive, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and transcendental energies. The energy that is working in the human body will be controlled and utilized in such a way that it becomes beneficial to human being in a sophisticated and complex ways. The energy that is constructive and beneficial can be a tool for human to achieve progress and advantage. On the other hand, the energy may also be destructive and may cause the human body and soul to decline<sup>[5]</sup>.

It is noted that “psychological well-being in a comprehensive way in relation to whether the individual has a goal in life, whether the individual can realize the potential he or she has, his or her relationship with other people, and whether the individual is responsible towards his or her own life<sup>[6]</sup>”. Past

studies have shown that the higher the intrinsic religious orientation of the person, the higher will be the person's psychological well-being<sup>[7,8,9]</sup>. Additionally, the relationship between religious orientation and psychological well-being is mediated by the relationship between a person's frequency of performing religious obligations and his or her psychological well-being<sup>[10]</sup>.

Some research results also showed that the teachings of the *tarekat* can prevent people from vice, increase piety and piousness in performing religious duties, and make people become committed and sincere in helping others. It might also increase piousness and earnestness in fulfilling the social obligations as demanded by the religious teachings<sup>[11,12]</sup>. Other studies have also shown that Yoga *Hatha* and meditation can reduce anxiety, significantly enhance mental health and factors of life quality, reduce negative mood, depression, fatigue, bewilderment, heartbeat, improve physical health, reduce pain, improve immunity, improve emotional life, help spiritual development, and significantly improve antibody effect of influenza vaccine<sup>[13,14,15,16]</sup>.

Moreover, there is a significant relationship between the three intelligences, namely, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being<sup>[17]</sup>. Looking at the results of past studies, apparently they are still studying the variables that are not comprehensive as has been done in this study. Therefore, this research studies the variables of *suluk* practice, religiosity, efficient management of the Six Basic Energies (physical, instinctive, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and transcendental) as well as psychological well-being. Additionally, this study also found that research on the practice of *Suluk* from the psychological perspective is much lacking. Hence, this research needs to be conducted.

### **Hypothesis**

This study aims to test the following research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *salik* (or *salikeen*) and *non-salik* (or *non-salikeen*).

Hypothesis 2: Gender, age, marital status, education, employment, frequency of practicing *suluk*, the last time of performing *suluk* are significant moderators to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks*.

Hypothesis 3: Religiosity and efficient management of the Six Basic Energies (physical, instinctive, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and transcendental) are significant mediators to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and the *non-saliks*.

### **The Objective of Research**

Following those hypothesis, this research aimed to examine the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being, to examine age and gender as significant moderators to the relationship between *suluk* practice and

psychological well-being. In addition, the study will look into the role of religiosity as a mediator the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being, efficient management of the Six Basic Energies (physical, instinctive, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and transcendental) as a significant mediator to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and the *non-saliks*.

*Saliks* (or *salikeen*) are subjects of the study who have practised *suluk* with *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* at least once. Meanwhile, *non-saliks* are subjects of the study who have not practised *suluk* with any *tarekat* group. However, the *saliks* under study will involve only the followers of the 10-day *suluk* programme organised at *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* in Medan, Indonesia. *Saliks* and *non-saliks* selected to be informant in this study were in their 40s (40-49 years old) and 50s (50-59 years old) and consisted of males and females.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Participants for the study consisted of 200 *salik* followers from the *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* as the subjects for the quantitative study and 7 subjects for the qualitative research because all the *saliks* fulfilled the characteristics required to be participants in this research. For example, all of them live in the city of Medan; aged between 40 and 59 years; have experienced practising *suluk* at *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* at least once; and they were easy to contact. On the other hand, 200 participants were selected to represent *non-saliks* group as the control group in the quantitative study and another 7 participants for the qualitative study. The same number of participants was selected to represent the *non-saliks* to balance the number of the *salik* group. These participants also fulfilled all the requirements to be participants in this study. For example, all of them live in Medan city; aged between 40 and 59 years; have not experienced practising *suluk* at *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* at least once; and they were easy to contact.

Data collection was involved the religiosity questionnaire, efficient management of the Six Basic Energies and psychological well-being as suggested by Suryanto<sup>[5]</sup>. The religiosity questionnaire measures motivation for the religiosity behaviour shown by an individual as arranged by Hoge<sup>[18]</sup>. Conceptually this questionnaire originated from Religious Orientation Scale aspects which consist of intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions as suggested by Allport and Ross<sup>[19]</sup>.

The questionnaire on efficient management of the Six Basic Energies was developed based on the management of Six Basic Energies which encompassed physical energy, instinctive energy, intellectual energy, emotional energy, spiritual energy, and transcendental energy among the *saliks* and *non-saliks*.

The questionnaire of psychological well-being used in this research was adapted from Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RPWB)<sup>[20]</sup>, which measures six dimensions of psychological well-being, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with others,

goal in life, and self-acceptance.

Research procedures were implemented in two stages, namely the preparation stage and the implementation stage. Finally, data analysis and discussion will be presented. After summarizing the research questions, the research proceeded with the search for a theoretical framework to be used for discussing the research results. Meanwhile, the religiosity questionnaire, the efficient scale for management of Six Basic Energies, the psychological well-being questionnaires were organized and prepared.

In the implementation stage of the research, the researcher determined the participants of the study and the data collection method. The participants of the research consisted of *saliks* who have practised *suluk* at the *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* and *non-saliks*. The researcher searched for data on the total Muslim population in Medan City, contacted the Muslim *saliks* and *non-saliks* in Medan City, introduced and persuaded them to participate in the study.

The objectives and benefits of the study to the researcher and the participants were explained the study participants, including the details of the activities involved, and the time they would be required to be present for the process of data collection for the research.

Then, the study participants were asked to fill the religiosity questionnaire, the efficient management of the six basic energies questionnaire, and psychological well-being questionnaire. At this stage the researcher conducted interview sessions with the seven research participants for the quantitative research regarding religiosity, efficient management of the six basic energies, and psychological well-being. During the closing session, the researcher thanked them for their cooperation in this research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis of research showed the calculations that lead to the following research results. The practice of *suluk* is significantly related to the psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks* ( $\beta = .765$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and all its aspects, that is, autonomy ( $\beta = .751$ ;  $p < .01$ ), control of environment ( $\beta = .525$ ;  $p < .01$ ), personal growth ( $\beta = .520$ ;  $p < .01$ ), positive relationship with others ( $\beta = .598$ ;  $p < .01$ ), purpose in life ( $\beta = .744$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and self-acceptance ( $\beta = .687$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Research results also showed that age, frequency of *suluk* and the last time performing *suluk* are moderators to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks* ( $\beta = .433$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Meanwhile, gender ( $\beta = .330$ ;  $p > .05$ ), marital status ( $\beta = -.111$ ;  $p > .05$ ), education ( $\beta = .146$ ;  $p > .05$ ), employment ( $\beta = .005$ ;  $p > .05$ ), frequency of *suluk* ( $\beta = .251$ ;  $p > .05$ ) and time of performing the last *suluk* ( $\beta = -1.448$ ;  $p > .05$ ) are not moderators to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks*.

Research results also showed that religiosity is a mediator to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological

well-being among *saliks* and *non-saliks* ( $\beta = .258$ ; sig.001) and all its aspects, that is, autonomy ( $\beta = .422$ ; sig.001), control of the environment ( $\beta = .427$ ; sig.001), personal growth ( $\beta = .418$ ; sig.001), positive relationship with others ( $\beta = .459$ ; sig.001), goal in life ( $\beta = .448$ ; sig.001), self-acceptance ( $\beta = .435$ ; sig.001).

Furthermore, the results showed that efficient management of the six basic energies is a mediator to the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks* ( $\beta = .661$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and all its aspects, that is, autonomy ( $\beta = .635$ ; sig.001), control of the environment ( $\beta = .517$ ; sig.001), personal growth ( $\beta = .397$ ; sig.001), positive relationship with others ( $\beta = .590$ ; sig.001), purpose in life ( $\beta = .607$ ; sig.001), self-acceptance ( $\beta = .605$ ; sig.001).

The results from the interviews showed that every behaviour and religious obligations performed by the *saliks* are their submission to Allah and the expression of their appreciation towards Allah, to gain the pleasure of Allah, and to obey His command. Meanwhile, for the *non-saliks* their purpose was to do good deeds, to gain the pleasure of Allah, to fulfil their responsibilities as Muslims, because they wish to practice what had been taught by their parents on to them, and as a trust that has been given to them by Allah.

It was found that from the interview on the theme of psychological well-being showed that the *saliks* are always thankful, patient, submissive, sincere, while the *non-saliks* feel sincere, willingly accept, never regret, satisfied, thankful; in fact many of them feel they have received many miracles from Allah, thus they are appreciative of everything.

The way of *salik* followers in the interaction socially showed that the *saliks* would perform whatever is beneficial as their religious deeds, friendship. They feel closer in their presence with others, they are concerned about others, they are willing to share, and that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah. Meanwhile, *non-saliks* feel that the quality of their relationship with others is good; they do not feel proud, they feel mutual appreciation with others, they do not want to hurt people, they are conceding, they wish to share the bounties of Allah, they are in good terms with everyone, they like to serve others, and they are humble to everyone.

Procedures in decision making of followers showed that they perceive the existing of Allah Al Mighty. If they are making decision, the *saliks* always put Allah in front, they remember Him, ask for guidance, and submit themselves to Him. They often look for ideas when making decisions as if they have obtained “Godly Knowledge”. Meanwhile, the *non-saliks* have discussions, consultations, refer to regulations, follow priorities, search for complete information, look for alternatives and take the least harmful alternative with the maximum benefits, and they perform the *istikharah* (intention) prayer.

The *non-saliks* feel that they are able to handle their environment and that the environment has suited well with their aspirations, with patience they approach it personally,

following the guidance found in their environment and they provide examples. However, they are still not satisfied with their environment because people around them have not put praying to Allah above all other activities. Meanwhile, the *non-saliks* handle their environment by giving advice, influence the thinking of others, become examples to others, supervise, control, and serve others. However, there are also among them who are unable to handle their environment.

For the *saliks*, their goal in life is directed more towards Allah, to make Allah please with them and to get the pleasure of Allah. Meanwhile, the *non-saliks* wish to be useful to others, they wish to die in *husnul khotimah*, happy in this world and in the hereafter, helping others, following the command of Allah and keeping distance from what He forbids, live long, continue to receive blessings and protection from Allah from damnations.

The *saliks* upgrade their personality by reading the commentaries of the Qur'an, listening to the call to religion. They also take formal lessons, they fast, they practise *suluk*, they perform *zikrullah*, they take care of the food they eat, they take part in sports, they search for information from the Internet and they follow training courses. On the other hand, the *non-saliks* uplift their personality by following classes, listening to religious talks and reading the Qur'an, participating in workshops, reading (newspapers, books, and magazines), watching news programme, surfing the internet, learning the Qur'an from religious teachers, and attending seminars.

This discussion shows the positive effects of Islamic Meditation Tradition on the Psychological –well being of salik followers. The research results showed that *suluk* practice has a significant positive relationship with the psychological well-being among the *saliks* and *non-saliks*. The finding of this research of psychological well-being is related to the practice of *suluk* and psychological well-being has no relationship with the practice of *suluk* with other religious practices.

Those findings were attuned with the idea that the *suluk* is an effort, a serious attempt to cleanse the body and soul. It is done by repenting and emptying the personality from the corrupted characteristics (internal and external vice) and filling it with laudable and obedient characteristics, internal and external, namely (i) controlling and mastering the self, and handling of self-indulgence; (ii) cleansing the self from worldly influence<sup>[21,22]</sup>. The teachings of the *tarekat* provide the experience and the feeling of the self being deeply close to Allah and getting farther away from vice, increasing faith and adding pioussness in performing religious obligations, and commitment and sincerity to help humanity<sup>[11]</sup>. People who orientate their life to spiritual and transcendental efforts report higher positive emotion, better personal condition, better physical health, paying more attention to others, and having higher positive well-being<sup>[23]</sup>.

The findings of this study also showed that age moderates the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being, while gender, marital status, education and employment

do not moderate the relationship between *suluk* practice and psychological well-being. The study finding is in line with Wilber's theory which said that transpersonal or transego is higher than the personal level of ego in late adults<sup>[24]</sup>. Hurlock also mentioned that interest in religious matters occur more to middle aged men and women than when they are young<sup>[25]</sup>. Theoretically it mentioned that age is one of the influential factors of a person's psychological well-being<sup>[26]</sup>. The dimension of goal in life declines when age increases. However, self-acceptance and relationship with others dimensions do not change when age increases.

It has been noted that the relationship between religious orientation and psychological well-being is strengthened by the frequency of performing religious obligations of an individual<sup>[1]</sup>. Furthermore, it has been revealed that those who orientate their goal in life towards spiritual and transcendental efforts report more positive emotion, better personal condition, better physical health, paying more attention to others, having higher positive well-being<sup>[23]</sup>. The finding of this study showed that life experience, which in this study refers to marital status, employment, frequency of practising *suluk*, and the last time performing *suluk* among the *saliks* and *non-saliks* are not among the important factors that determine a person's psychological well-being. Apparently, other life experiences may well influence people's well-being. Although people's life experiences will differ and especially are determined by the place where they live, nevertheless the nature of their work, and their respective specialized experience and depend upon the way they are interpreted.

The religiosity is a mediator to the relationship between the practice of *suluk* and psychological well-being was revealed by data obtained. It was accordance with previously research<sup>[11]</sup>, which said that the teachings of the *tarekat* develop individual piety and keep people away from vice, make them increase their faith and increase their piety when performing religious obligations and make them committed and sincere to help human kind. It was found that the higher the intensity of the experience of the teachings of *tarekat*, the higher will be the obedience and seriousness of fulfilling the social aspects of religious teachings<sup>[12]</sup>. Additionally, the higher the internal religious orientation (religiosity) of a person, the higher will be the person's psychological well-being<sup>[8]</sup>. Thus, there is a positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and the measure of psychological well-being<sup>[7]</sup>. In addition, there is a negative relationship between extrinsic religious orientation and the aspects of autonomy. Levin and Chatters argued that religion has a significant and major influence on psychological health and well-being, especially the influence from religious organizations<sup>[27]</sup>.

Data also showed that the efficient management of the six basic energies is a mediator variable to the relationship between *suluk* and psychological well-being. Findings showed that the people who orientate their direction in life towards spiritual and transcendental efforts report more positive emotion, better personal condition, better physical health, paying more attention to others, and having higher positive

well-being<sup>[23]</sup>. The energy which is working in the human body will experience rearrangement and utilization by the human personality in complex and sophisticated ways that it provides benefits to mankind<sup>5</sup>. The constructive and efficient management of the six basic energies will provide benefits to the development of positive psychological well-being.

## CONCLUSION

Data analysis generates some conclusions; First the practice of *suluk* is positively related with psychological well-being that has been practice by the followers of *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* in Medan North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Second, the findings showed that age moderates the relationship between the practice of *suluk* and psychological well-being. On the other hand, gender, marital status, education, employment status, the last time of performing *suluk* and the frequency of practising *suluk* do not moderate the relationship between practicing *suluk* and psychological well-being. Third, religiosity moderates the relationship between practice of *suluk* and psychological well-being. Fourth, the management of the six basic energies moderates the relationship between the practice of *suluk* and psychological well-being.

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