IJoIS: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies
Vol. 7, 1 (January-June, 2026), pp. 55-70
EISSN: 2745-7745, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59525/ijois.1502

Sufi Dance in the Qur'an, Hadith, and Psychology: A Critical Reassessment of Spiritual Claims and Therapeutic Benefits

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Sufi Dance;
Epistemology of Worship;
Qur'anic Perspective;
Hadith Authentication;
Psychology of Religion

Article history:

Received 2026-02-03
Revised 2026-03-18
Accepted 2026-05-12

ABSTRACT

This study aims to critically analyze Sufi Dance, also known as Whirling Dervish, from three interdisciplinary perspectives: the Qur'an, Hadith, and Psychology. Existing studies lack an integrated critical analysis combining Qur'anic, hadith, and psychological perspectives. Using a qualitative library research method with a content analysis approach combined with sanad (chain of narrators) and matan (text) criticism, this research investigates the epistemic origins of Sufi Dance as a spiritual expression within Sufism, its claimed religious foundations, and its psychological impacts. The findings reveal a significant discrepancy between its spiritual claims and its empirical benefits. From the Qur'anic perspective, there is no direct or sound evidence supporting Sufi Dance as a prescribed form of worship, as the often-cited verse from QS. Sad: 33 is interpreted through a weak and overly liberal analogy. From the Hadith perspective, critical analysis of sanad and matan demonstrates that the narrations used to justify this practice are either weak (da'if) or forged (maudhu'), while authentic hadiths about expressions of joy are contextualized as permissible entertainment rather than established ritual worship. Conversely, from the psychological perspective, Sufi Dance shows substantial benefits as a form of spiritual psychotherapy, where structured movement combined with dhikr (remembrance of God) induces mental calmness and inner peace, and fosters positive behavioral changes such as increased patience, focus, and self-confidence. In conclusion, while Sufi Dance lacks valid foundations as ritual Islamic worship (ibadah mahdhah) from the primary sources of Sharia, it holds significant value as a cultural heritage and a psycho-spiritual discipline for mental well-being. This study recommends a clear distinction between its religious claims and its cultural-psychological utility to prevent theological confusion while appreciating its therapeutic role. The contributions of this research are twofold: first, a normative contribution through the application of hadith criticism to the practice of Sufi Dance, and second, an interdisciplinary contribution integrating Sharia and psychological perspectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The debate regarding the permissibility of dance in Islam, particularly Sufi Dance (Whirling Dervish), has long been a contested discourse in Islamic intellectual history. This practice, often associated with spiritual ecstasy and dhikr, raises a fundamental normative ambiguity: does it constitute a form of ritual worship (*ibadah mahdhah*) or merely a cultural expression of spirituality? This ambiguity has led to a sharp disjuncture between empirical acceptance of Sufi Dance in many Muslim societies, including Indonesia, and its doctrinal rejection by a significant number of classical and contemporary scholars.

Classical scholarship has largely taken a critical stance against dance practices in religious contexts. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani noted that some Sufi circles used the hadith about the play of the Abyssinians (*Habasyah*) in the presence of the Prophet Muhammad as evidence for the permissibility of dancing and listening to entertainment. However, the majority of scholars refuted this inference (*istidlal*) due to the difference in purpose and context, arguing that the Abyssinians' spear-play was agility training and war preparation, not a ritual dance or spiritual entertainment (al-'Asqalani, 1379 H). Similarly, al-Qurtubi, when interpreting QS. Luqman (18-19), stated that these verses were used as evidence for the condemnation of dancing, as dance often intersects with arrogance and heedlessness (al-Qurtubi, 1964). Abu al-Wafā' Ibn 'Aqil explicitly linked the prohibition of dancing to QS. al-Isrā' (37), which condemns walking arrogantly, considering dance a manifestation of futility and arrogance, especially when accompanied by music and clapping (al-Qurtubi, 1964). Al-San'ani also considered dancing and clapping as actions of wicked people (*fasiq*) (al-San'ani, n.d.). Even harsher criticism came from al-Imam Abu Bakr al-Turtushi, who viewed dhikr gatherings accompanied by drumming, dancing, and ecstasy to the point of fainting as a deviation lacking any basis in the Qur'an and Sunnah, resembling idol worship rituals (al-Qurtubi, 1964). This critical view, he claimed, represented the school of thought (*mazhab*) of the great imams of Ahl al-Sunnah, including Malik, Abu Hanifah, al-Shafi'i, and Ahmad bin Hanbal.

Despite this strong normative critique, contemporary scholarship offers a more nuanced and, in some cases, accepting perspective on bodily movement and emotional expression in spiritual contexts. Contemporary scholars and researchers have increasingly focused on the symbolic meanings, psychological benefits, and socio-cultural functions of Sufi Dance, shifting the discussion from strict legal orthodoxy to empirical and contextual understanding. This divergence between classical rejection and contemporary empirical acceptance forms the central debate of this study.

Several previous studies have explored Sufi Dance but remain partial in their approaches. Research by Slamet Nugroho (2021) on the Sufi Dance community in Pekalongan interprets the practice as a symbol of divine love internalized through attributes and movements, relying entirely on subjective community experiences without examining normative legitimacy. Similarly, Krisgianto et al. (2022) shifted focus to psychological dimensions, positioning Sufi Dance as an effective therapy medium for mental tranquility and positive behavioral changes, but they did not clearly distinguish between psychological benefits and religious claims, thereby conflating therapeutic function with the status of worship. Ayu Kristina (2019) placed Sufi Dance in the context of sociology of religion and character education, understanding it as a means of fostering moderate religiosity among young Muslims, yet without critical analysis of sharia legitimacy. Meanwhile, M. Rizki Syahrul Ramadhan's study (2020) on Ali Mustafa Yaqub's method of hadith criticism offers a robust methodological framework for assessing problematic hadiths, emphasizing sanad and matan criticism as well as

alignment with the Qur'an, historical facts, and sound reason. However, this framework has not been directly applied to the hadiths often used to justify Sufi Dance.

From this review, three explicit research gaps emerge. First, there is a lack of direct application of sanad-matan criticism to the specific hadiths cited as justifications for Sufi Dance. Second, existing studies lack an integrated analysis combining normative Islamic perspectives (Qur'an and Hadith) with psychological perspectives in a single critical framework. Third, there is a persistent conflation between normative-doctrinal claims (i.e., that Sufi Dance is a form of worship) and empirical-therapeutic benefits (i.e., that it provides psychological well-being), without clear distinction or critical assessment.

To address these gaps, this study introduces several elements of novelty. First, it applies hadith criticism methodology—specifically sanad and matan analysis—directly to narrations used to justify Sufi Dance, an approach largely absent in previous studies. Second, it integrates three distinct disciplinary perspectives (Qur'anic exegesis, hadith authentication, and psychology of religion) within a single analytical framework. Third, it explicitly distinguishes between religious claims of worship and cultural-psychological utility, offering a clear conceptual separation to prevent theological confusion.

Theoretically, this study is anchored by two conceptual frameworks. First, the distinction between *bid'ah* (innovation in worship) and permissible cultural expression, as articulated by classical and contemporary Islamic legal theory. Second, the psychology of religion framework, which examines religious and spiritual practices for their therapeutic effects without necessarily endorsing their doctrinal validity (Kholishuddin, 2020). These anchors allow the study to assess Sufi Dance both normatively and empirically without conflating the two domains.

The flow of this introduction proceeds as follows: it first presents the background of the normative debate surrounding Sufi Dance, highlighting the divergence between classical rejection and contemporary empirical acceptance. It then reviews previous studies and identifies their limitations. Subsequently, it formulates the research gaps explicitly and states the novelty of the present study. Finally, it outlines the theoretical framework and research objectives. This structure avoids circularity and redundancy, compressing similar critical arguments rather than repeating them throughout (Ghozali, 2025).

Regarding local context, Indonesia provides a particularly relevant case for this study. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has witnessed the rapid development of Sufi Dance not only within Sufi orders (*tarekat*) but also as public art, cultural expression, and a medium for spiritual tourism. The current socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia—including rising public interest in spiritual practices, debates over religious orthodoxy versus local tradition, and government-supported programs promoting moderate Islam—make the critical reassessment of Sufi Dance both timely and socially significant. Strengthening this local relevance, the present study situates its analysis within these contemporary Indonesian dynamics, acknowledging that the practice has taken root in ways that demand academic attention beyond mere legal condemnation or uncritical celebration.

Therefore, this research aims to fill the identified gaps by critically examining Sufi Dance from three main perspectives: the Qur'an (through exegetical analysis), Hadith (through sanad and matan criticism), and Psychology (through therapeutic benefit assessment). This research does not aim to negate the reality of the benefits and cultural values of Sufi Dance, but rather seeks to place them proportionally by clearly distinguishing between sharia claims and psycho-spiritual functions in everyday life. With this approach, this research provides a balanced and objective academic contribution that prevents theological confusion while appreciating the therapeutic and cultural roles of Sufi Dance in contemporary Muslim society, particularly in Indonesia.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical library research approach (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). This approach was chosen because library research is particularly suitable for examining normative and textual traditions such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship, where the primary data are written texts rather than direct field observations or human subjects. Library research allows for in-depth critical analysis of religious texts and their interpretations, which is essential for assessing the legitimacy of Sufi Dance from Islamic legal and theological perspectives, while simultaneously enabling integration with psychological theories derived from published literature. Thus, this design is justified as it aligns with the study's objective to critically reassess spiritual claims and therapeutic benefits through textual and interdisciplinary analysis.

The primary data sources in this research include relevant Qur'anic verses, specifically QS. Sad: 33 as well as other verses frequently cited in discussions of dance and bodily expression, hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from standard collections such as Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawud, and Musnad Ahmad, and classical books on Sufism and Islamic law, particularly Ihya' 'Ulumuddin by al-Ghazali. Secondary data sources were obtained from books, scientific journal articles, theses, dissertations, and other publications specifically discussing Sufi Dance, Sufism, spiritual psychology, and art in Islam. To ensure the quality and relevance of the data, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria comprised: primary hadith sources from the nine canonical collections (al-Kutub al-Tis'ah); classical scholarly works written between the 3rd and 8th centuries AH that directly address the issue of dance, music, or bodily movement in worship contexts; contemporary peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2000 onwards that empirically examine the psychological or therapeutic effects of Sufi Dance or similar spiritual movement practices; and texts available in Arabic, English, or Indonesian languages. The exclusion criteria comprised: hadiths with missing or incomplete chains of transmission; popular or non-academic internet sources without scholarly verification; and secondary sources that merely repeat classical arguments without original analysis.

Data collection was carried out through documentation with a systematic procedure. The search strategy involved three stages. First, keyword-based searches were conducted in academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and the Indonesian Reference Database (MORAREF) using the following keywords in various combinations: "Sufi Dance," "Whirling Dervish," "raqs Sufi," "dhikr movement," "Sufism and dance," "Islamic law on dance," "hadith criticism," and "spiritual psychology." Second, manual searches were performed in classical hadith collections using index-based methods to locate all narrations containing terms such as raqs (dance), lahw (diversion or entertainment), ghina' (singing), and darb (striking or beating as in rhythmic movement). Third, snowball sampling was applied by tracing citations from relevant articles and classical texts to identify additional sources not captured by initial keyword searches.

The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis and critical analysis techniques. Content analysis was used to parse and understand the meanings contained in primary and secondary texts (Fadli, 2021). Meanwhile, critical analysis was applied specifically to hadith data, which involved two main stages. The first stage was sanad analysis, which traced the complete chain of narrators (isnad) for each hadith used to justify Sufi Dance and assessed the credibility of each narrator based on criteria of 'adalah (moral integrity) and dhabit (precision in narration). This stage also examined the continuity (ittisal) of the chain to ensure that each narrator directly received from their predecessor without gaps, and ultimately determined the ruling on the hadith's authenticity—whether sahih, hasan, da'if, or maudhu'—based on consensus among hadith scholars following the methodology of classical critics such as al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Hajar. The second stage was matan analysis, which examined the content of the hadith text for compatibility with the Qur'an and established Sunnah, checked for contradictions (mukhalafah) with stronger narrations or sound reasoning, and identified linguistic anomalies or illogical elements that would indicate forgery or misattribution. Only hadiths that passed both sanad and matan scrutiny were considered valid as hujjah (evidentiary proof) (Azhary, Hakim, Firdaus, bin Asis, et al., 2025).

For the psychological discussion, data were analyzed thematically using the framework of transpersonal psychology, which was selected because it specifically addresses spiritual and transcendent experiences—including ecstatic states, altered consciousness, and the integration of bodily movement with spiritual intention—that are central to Sufi Dance practice. This framework allowed the study to identify therapeutic benefits such as mental tranquility, behavioral changes, and increased spirituality without conflating these benefits with normative claims of worship. The thematic analysis followed six phases: familiarization with the psychological literature on Sufi Dance and related practices; generating initial codes such as anxiety reduction, focus enhancement, and self-confidence; searching for themes including cognitive effects, emotional regulation, and spiritual well-being; reviewing themes against the data; defining and naming themes; and producing the final analysis.

The overall data analysis was conducted in three sequential stages to ensure systematic processing. The first stage was textual extraction, which involved identifying and extracting all relevant passages from primary and secondary sources pertaining to Sufi Dance, including Qur'anic verses, hadith narrations, classical legal opinions, and psychological studies. The second stage was classification, which organized the extracted data into three analytical categories: normative data comprising Qur'anic and hadith-based rulings on dance and bodily movement in worship; historical-contextual data comprising classical scholarly opinions and their contexts; and empirical-psychological data comprising reported therapeutic benefits of Sufi Dance. The third stage was evaluation, which involved applying the appropriate analytical tools to each category—sanad-matan criticism for hadith data, exegetical analysis for Qur'anic data, and transpersonal thematic analysis for psychological data—followed by synthesis across categories to answer the research questions and build a comprehensive and critical understanding of Sufi Dance from the three perspectives studied.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, two strategies were employed. The first was source triangulation, which cross-checked data across multiple types of sources including Qur'anic exegesis, hadith collections, classical legal texts, and contemporary psychological studies to ensure consistency and identify contradictions. The second was scholarly cross-verification, which consulted established works of hadith criticism (takhrīj) from recognized scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (Fath al-Bari), al-Nawawi (Sharh Sahih Muslim), and al-Albani (Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Da'ifah) to verify the authenticity rulings assigned to each hadith. No single source was accepted at face value without corroboration from at least two independent scholarly references.

This research involved no human subjects, direct observation, or any form of intervention on living individuals, as all data were derived entirely from published and publicly accessible written texts. Therefore, no ethical approval from an institutional review board was required, and the research was conducted in accordance with standard academic practices of proper citation, avoidance of plagiarism, and respectful engagement with differing scholarly opinions.

Finally, this study acknowledges several methodological limitations. As a library-based study, its findings are dependent on textual interpretation and the availability of primary sources, and it does not include empirical validation through clinical trials, surveys, or direct observation of Sufi Dance practitioners. Consequently, while the psychological benefits discussed in the literature are reported as findings, this study cannot independently verify those claims through original empirical data. Furthermore, the analysis relies heavily on the accuracy and completeness of existing hadith collections and their translations, and any errors or omissions in these sources may affect the findings. The interpretation of classical Arabic texts also inevitably involves an element of subjectivity, despite the use of established hermeneutical methods, and the psychological analysis is limited to published studies, unable to capture the lived, subjective experiences of practitioners in real-time. Future research may address these limitations by incorporating empirical field studies, clinical psychological assessments, and ethnographic observations of Sufi Dance communities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research analyzes four main aspects: (1) the epistemology of Sufi Dance, (2) the hadith foundations used to permit Sufi Dance along with criticism of the validity of their sanad and matan, (3) the Qur'anic verses often used as justification along with methodological criticism of their interpretation, and (4) its psychological impact as a medium for mental therapy. The integration of these four perspectives is then synthesized into a conceptual model that distinguishes between normative claims and empirical benefits.

3.1 Epistemology of Sufi Dance

Before critically assessing Sufi Dance, it is necessary to establish a clear definition of epistemology in this context. Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge that examines the origins, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge claims. In the context of Sufi Dance, epistemological inquiry asks: What is the source of knowledge that legitimizes this practice as a spiritual discipline? Is it derived from divine revelation (wahyu), prophetic tradition (sunnah), rational deduction (ijtihad), mystical experience (kashf), or cultural inheritance? This study adopts an Islamic epistemological framework that prioritizes the Qur'an and authentic Hadith as primary sources of normative knowledge (al-'ilm al-naqli), while recognizing empirical psychology as a secondary source of descriptive knowledge (al-'ilm al-'aqli) about therapeutic effects.

Sufi Dance, also known as Whirling Dervish, was developed by Jalaluddin Rumi in Turkey during the 13th century CE. Historically, this dance emerged from the Mevlevi order (tarekat) founded by Rumi's followers after his death. However, it is important to distinguish between historical fact and interpretive narrative. The historical fact is that Rumi practiced dhikr and spinning as a personal expression of spiritual ecstasy, as documented in primary sources such as Shams-i Tabrīzī's discourses and Rumi's own Masnavi. The interpretive narrative—that Sufi Dance constitutes a prescribed form of ritual worship (ibadah mahdhah) with specific legal standing in Islam—is a later development not substantiated by Rumi's own writings. According to Nitia WSS (February 11, 2018), the emergence of this dance originated from Rumi's spiritual anxiety in his search for God, until finally he found awareness of the divine presence, which he expressed through continuous spinning movements (Firdasari & Iksan, 2025). This personal expression, however, does not automatically translate into a universally binding religious practice.

Sufi Dance is often understood as a form of worship practice within Sufi tradition. Sufism is perceived as a transcendental science touching the inner dimension and mystical aspects of Islam, hence often referred to as mysticism (Fallah et al., 2023). According to Muhammad Hisyam Kabbani, the controversial impression of Sufism arises due to deviant practices or pseudo-Sufism not in accordance with its original teachings (Kabbani, 1998). This distinction is crucial: authentic Sufism emphasizes adherence to sharia, while practices lacking such adherence represent epistemological deviation.

The symbolism of Sufi Dance requires connection to Islamic metaphysics (tasawwuf theory). The white clothing symbolizes the shroud (kafan), the tall hat (sikke) resembles a tombstone, and the black cloak represents the grave. These symbols point to the Sufi concept of dying before death (mūtū qabla an tamūtū), a spiritual state where the ego is annihilated (fana') before physical death. Furthermore, Sufi Dance is often analogized to the tawaf ritual in Mecca, as the spinning movements resemble circling the Ka'bah (Kristina, 2019). However, this analogy requires critical evaluation: tawaf is a divinely ordained ritual with specific rules, while Sufi Dance is a human-initiated practice developed centuries after revelation. The analogy is thus metaphorical, not jurisprudential.

Ibn al-Hujwiri outlined provisions for Sufi Dance, including the presence of a shaykh, a venue open to the public, purification of the heart, not exceeding reasonable limits, and focusing attention solely on Allah (Nugroho, 2021). These conditions indicate that even within Sufi tradition, the practice is understood as an regulated discipline rather than unrestricted ritual. The existence of Sufi Dance is important to maintain as cultural heritage, considering it originates from Turkish culture and is now developing within Indonesian society. Each movement contains symbolic meaning: a movement resembling prayer indicates the dancer offering prayers and expressing servitude to Allah (Yuliana et

al., 2025). Critically, however, resemblance to prayer does not confer the legal status of prayer. The epistemological claim that Sufi Dance constitutes worship must be evaluated against normative sources, not symbolic interpretation alone.

3.2 Sufi Dance from the Perspective of Hadith

3.2.1 Hadiths Used as the Basis for the Permissibility of Sufi Dance

This research traces and critically analyzes hadith narrations frequently cited as justifications for the permissibility of Sufi Dance. Proponents, particularly Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin*, refer to several narrations from the canonical collections. The core inference (*wajh istidlal*) from these narrations is that if dancing were a prohibited act, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) would certainly have rebuked or forbidden such actions. However, the Prophet saw and directly witnessed these events and did not record them as an evil (*munkar*) in his Sunnah. This silence and tacit approval serve as a strong indication that such activities are permissible.

The following narrations are among those most frequently cited:

A) Hadith narrated by Ahmad

حدثنا عبد الصمد قال: حدثنا حماد عن ثابت، عن أنس بن مالك رضي الله عنه قال: كانت الحبشة يزفنون بين يدي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ويرقصون ويقولون: محمد عبد صالح فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "ما يقولون؟" قالوا: يقولون: محمد عبد صالح.

حدثنا عبد الرزاق، حدثنا معمر عن ثابت عن أنس بن مالك قال: لما قدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم المدينة لعبت الحبشة لقدومه بحرابهم فرحا بذلك.

حدثنا خلف بن الوليد قال: حدثنا عباد بن عباد عن محمد بن عمرو عن يحيى بن عبد الرحمن، عن عائشة رضي الله عنها قالت: لعبت الحبشة عند النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم في المسجد، فجئت أنظر فجعل يطأطئ لي منكبيه لأنظر إليهم.

حدثنا ابن نمير قال: حدثنا هشام عن أبيه عن عائشة، أن الحبشة كانوا يلعبون عند رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في يوم عيد، قالت: فاطلعت من فوق عاتقه، فطأطأ لي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم منكبيه، فجعلت أنظر إليهم من فوق عاتقه حتى شبعت ثم انصرفت.

حدثنا سليمان بن داود قال: حدثنا عبد الرحمن يعني ابن أبي الزناد عن هشام بن عروة عن أبيه، عن عائشة قالت: وضع رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ذقني على منكبيه لأنظر إلى زفن الحبشة حتى كنت التي مللت فانصرفت عنهم.

حدثنا أسود يعني ابن عامر أخبرنا إسرائيل عن أبي إسحاق، عن هانئ بن هانئ عن علي قال: أتيت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم وجعفر وزيد، قال: فقال لزيد: "أنت مولاي" فحجل، قال: وقال لجعفر: "أنت أشبهت خلقي وخلقي" قال: فحجل وراء زيد، قال: وقال لي: "أنت مني وأنا منك"، قال: فحجلت وراء جعفر.(Ahmad bin Hanbal, 1995)

B) Hadith narrated by al-Bukhari

حدثنا يحيى بن بكير قال: حدثنا الليث عن عقيل، عن ابن شهاب عن عروة عن عائشة أن أبا بكر رضي الله عنه دخل عليها وعندها جاريتان في أيام منى تدففان وتضربان، والنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم متغش بثوبه، فانتهرهما أبو بكر، فكشف النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال: "دعهما يا أبا بكر، فإنها أيام عيد وتلك الأيام أيام منى". وقالت عائشة: رأيت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يسترني وأنا أنظر إلى الحبشة وهم يلعبون في المسجد فزجرهم عمر فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: "دعهم أمنا بني أرفدة" يعني من الأمن.

حدثنا عبد العزيز بن عبد الله قال: حدثنا إبراهيم بن سعد عن صالح بن كيسان عن ابن شهاب قال: أخبرني عروة بن الزبير أن عائشة قالت: لقد رأيت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يوما على باب حجرتي والحبشة يلعبون في المسجد ورسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يسترني بردائه أنظر إلى لعبهم.(Al-Bukhari, 1442 H)

C) Hadith narrated by Muslim

حدثني هارون بن سعيد الأيلي حدثنا ابن وهب، أخبرني عمرو، حدثه عن عروة، عن عائشة أن أبا بكر دخل عليها وعندها جاريتان في أيام منى تغنيان وتضربان، ورسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم مسجى بثوبه، فانتهرهما أبو بكر فكشف رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم عنه قال: "دعهما يا أبا بكر فإنها أيام عيد". وقالت: رأيت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يسترني بردائه، وأنا أنظر إلى الحبشة وهم يلعبون وأنا جارية، فاقدروا قدر الجارية العربية الحديثة السن.(Muslim, n.d.)

D) Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud

حدثنا الحسن بن علي، حدثنا عبد الرزاق، أخبرنا معمر عن ثابت عن أنس بن مالك رضي الله عنه قال: لما قدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم المدينة لعبت الحبشة لقدومه فرحا بذلك، لعبوا بحرابهم.(Abu Dawud, n.d.)

E) Hadith narrated by Ibn Hibban

أخبرنا الحسن بن سفيان قال: حدثنا هدبة بن خالد قال: حدثنا حماد بن سليمان عن ثابت عن أنس بن مالك رضي الله عنه أن الحبشة كانوا يزفنون بين يدي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ويتكلمون بكلام لا يفهمه، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "ما يقولون؟" قالوا: يقولون: محمد عبد صالح.(Ibn Hibban, 1988)

Imam al-Ghazali constructed eight arguments from these narrations to support the permissibility of singing, dancing, and playing: (1) the permissibility of play activities including the dancing and performances of the Abyssinians; (2) the permissibility of such activities taking place within the mosque area; (3) the Prophet's explicit command "Play, O Bani Arfidah" as an instruction and permission; (4) the Prophet's prohibition to Abu Bakr and Umar from preventing such activities on Eid, confirming that expressions of joy are permissible; (5) the Prophet himself standing for a considerable time to watch with Aisha; (6) the Prophet's initiative to ask Aisha "Would you like to watch?" as an act of kindness; (7) the permissibility of two young girls singing and playing the tambourine; and (8) the Prophet listening to their voices while lying down, indicating that women's singing is not automatically forbidden (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Regarding the term "*hajl*" (hopping/jumping), al-Ghazali explains: "This action arises from the impulse of joy or longing. Its ruling follows the cause behind it. If the joy is praiseworthy joy (for example, due to worship or obedience) and the dance becomes a means that adds to and strengthens that joy, then the dance is also praiseworthy. However, if the joy is merely permissible (*mubah*), then the dance is also *mubah*" (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

3.2.2 Critical Analysis of Sanad and Matan

While acknowledging al-Ghazali's arguments, a critical evaluation applying sanad and matan criticism reveals important distinctions. The following table presents the systematic classification of hadith status:

No	Narration	Source	Sanad Status	Matan Status	Final Ruling
1	Abyssinians playing with spears on Eid	Ahmad, Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud	Sahih	Authentic (spear-play as agility training, not ritual dance)	Sahih as historical event, but inapplicable as worship legitimation
2	Young girls singing and playing tambourine on Eid	Bukhari, Muslim	Sahih	Authentic (context: Eid celebration, not dhikr gathering)	Sahih, but specific to Eid and permissible entertainment
3	Prophet watching Abyssinians with Aisha	Bukhari, Muslim	Sahih	Authentic	Sahih, indicates permissibility of harmless entertainment
4	Abyssinians dancing and saying "Muhammad 'abdun salih"	Ahmad, Ibn Hibban	Sahih but with critical note	The word "yazfinūn" (they dance) is authentic, but refers to a specific cultural performance, not ritual worship	Sahih, contextual as celebration of Prophet's arrival
5	Ali, Ja'far, Zaid hopping (hajl)	Ahmad, al-Baihaqi	Da'if (Hani' ibn Hani' is majhūl/unknown)	Contains addition of word "raqaṣa" (danced) which is munkar (rejected)	Da'if, cannot be used as hujjah
6	Hadith "Those who shake while performing dhikr precede others"	Cited by Hammani	Maudū' (fabricated chain)	Contradicts authentic hadith; no known reliable source	Maudū', completely rejected
7	Hadith "The noble person is not noble if he does not shake when remembering his beloved"	Cited by Hammani	Maudū'	No authentic origin; contains exaggerated language	Maudū', completely rejected

The critical analysis reveals that the narration about Ja'far dancing before the Prophet contains the weak addition of the word "danced." Imam al-Baihaqi in his books Sunan al-Kubra and al-Adab, as well as Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, narrated this hadith with the term "hajal" (hopped) rather than "raqasa" (danced). Al-Baihaqi explained: "We came to the Prophet with Ali, Ja'far, and Zaid. The Messenger of Allah said to Zaid: 'You are our brother and maula,' so Zaid jumped for joy (hajal). To Ja'far, he said: 'You resemble me in appearance and character,' then Ja'far also jumped. Then to Ali, he said: 'You are from me, and I am from you,' so Ali also jumped." The chain of transmission of this hadith is considered weak (da'if) because one of its narrators, Hani' ibn Hani', is very unknown (laisa bi al-ma'ruf jiddan) (al-Baihaqi, 2003). Al-Baihaqi then clarified that "hajal" is a hopping movement on one foot as a spontaneous outburst of joy, which cannot be equated with excessive dancing resembling women's movements, considered disliked (makruh) in sharia (al-Baihaqi, 1988).

An important finding that represents a key analytical contribution of this study is the distinction between hajl (spontaneous hopping) and formalized ritual dance. The three noble companions—Ali, Zaid, and Ja'far—have never been authentically proven to have performed hopping movements in front of the Prophet while he was seated. Scholars affirm that the claim regarding these jumps is something fabricated and falsely attributed to them. Using this narration to legitimize Sufi Dance as a ritual worship practice constitutes an error in understanding religious texts.

Furthermore, acknowledging scholarly differences (ikhtilaf) is necessary for academic balance. While this study adopts a critical stance, it recognizes that some reputable scholars, including al-Ghazali and certain Sufi masters, have permitted forms of expressive movement in specific contexts. The permissibility they endorse, however, is for permissible entertainment (mubah) or cultural expression, not for establishing a new form of ritual worship (ibadah mahdhah) (Ayub, 2018). This distinction is often blurred in popular discourse. Therefore, the findings of this study do not entirely negate the permissibility of dance as harmless activity, but rather reject the claim that Sufi Dance constitutes a prescribed or recommended act of worship based on authentic prophetic guidance.

3.3 Sufi Dance from the Perspective of the Qur'an

3.3.1 Analysis of Cited Verses

Proponents of Sufi Dance occasionally cite Qur'anic verses to provide legitimacy. Among the most frequently cited is Surah Sad verses 32-33 concerning Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him):

فَقَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَحۡبَبۡتُ حُبَّ ٱلۡخَيۡرِ عَن ذِكۡرِ رَبِّي حَتَّىٰ تَوَارَتۡ بِٱلۡحِجَابِ (32) رُدُّوهَا عَلَيَّۖ فَطَفِقَ مَسۡحَۢا بِٱلسُّوقِ وَٱلۡأَعۡنَاقِ(33)

"Then he said, 'Indeed, I preferred the love of good [horses] to the remembrance of my Lord until the sun disappeared behind the curtain.' [32] 'Return them to me.' Then he began to wipe [their] legs and necks." (33)

In Sufi tradition, some interpret Prophet Solomon's action of wiping the horses' shins and necks as a manifestation of overflowing spiritual love. However, a comparative tafsir analysis across multiple exegetes reveals a different understanding. Al-Qurtubi (1964) in his Tafsir interprets this verse in its literal context: Solomon was preoccupied with his horses until he missed the afternoon prayer (`Asr), then he regretted his distraction and wiped the horses' legs and necks—either as a gesture of sacrifice for Allah or as a wiping of dust. Al-Tabari interprets it similarly as regret for missing remembrance, not as legitimization for ecstatic dancing. Ibn Kathir understands it as Solomon's repentance for his momentary distraction. None of the major classical exegetes interpret this verse as justification for dance or spinning as a form of worship. The Sufi interpretation thus represents an allegorical reading that, while spiritually evocative, lacks methodological grounding in usul al-tafsir (Ichwan dkk., 2024).

Another verse sometimes cited is Surah Ali Imran verse 191:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

"Who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and [lying] on their sides."

Some groups associate this with companions like Abdullah bin Umar and Urwah bin Zubair who performed dhikr while standing on Eid. However, applying usul al-tafsir principles, this verse speaks about the freedom of a servant to perform dhikr in any physical condition—standing, sitting, or reclining—as an expression of continuous remembrance. It does not provide legitimization for choreographed spinning movements accompanied by music as a ritual practice. The verse emphasizes the permissibility of dhikr in all postures, not the prescription of a specific dance form.

3.3.2 Theological Framing through Maqasid al-Shariah

To maintain analytical neutrality and avoid an overly normative tone, this study frames the Qur'anic analysis within maqasid al-shariah (higher objectives of Islamic law). The five essential objectives are the preservation of religion (hifz al-din), life (nafs), intellect (aql), lineage (nasl), and property (mal) (Afabih dkk., 2026). When evaluating Sufi Dance, two potentially competing objectives emerge: preservation of religion requires protecting worship from innovation (bid'ah) that could alter or add to prescribed rituals; preservation of intellect supports practices that enhance mental well-being and cognitive function. The challenge is to balance these objectives without conflating them.

The sub-conclusion from the Qur'anic perspective is clear: there is no direct, explicit Qur'anic verse that commands, recommends, or even describes Sufi Dance as a form of worship. The verses cited by proponents are either taken out of their exegetical context or subjected to allegorical interpretations not supported by classical tafsir methodology. This does not render Sufi Dance forbidden (haram) as a cultural activity, but it negates the claim that it has a qath'i (definitive) Qur'anic foundation as an act of worship. Maintaining this distinction prevents theological confusion while acknowledging the spiritual value practitioners may subjectively experience.

3.4 Sufi Dance from the Perspective of Psychology

3.4.1 Mechanism: How Spinning Affects Cognition and Emotion

Psychology as a discipline has a close relationship with psychotherapy, which focuses on studying human behavior to build mental health and address abnormal conditions. There are significant points of convergence between psychotherapy and Sufism, as both aim to overcome human psychological problems. Since the early development of Islam, Sufism has paid great attention to inner dimensions to achieve noble character and a peaceful life (Azhary, Firdaus, dkk., 2025).

To strengthen the conceptual basis, modern psychology theories can illuminate the therapeutic mechanisms of Sufi Dance. First, mindfulness theory explains that focused attention on the present moment—such as maintaining awareness of spinning and dhikr recitation—reduces rumination and anxiety. The dancer's concentration on Allah, the rotation, and the recited phrases creates a state of mindful absorption. Second, flow state theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) describes optimal experience where individuals are fully immersed in an activity, losing self-consciousness and time awareness. The whirling movement, when executed proficiently, induces flow characterized by reduced anxiety, increased enjoyment, and intrinsic reward. Third, embodied cognition theory posits that bodily movements influence cognitive and emotional states. The repetitive, rhythmic spinning may regulate nervous system activity, promoting parasympathetic (calming) responses.

As an Islamic-themed dance functioning as psychological therapy, Sufi Dance has specific procedures. The spinning begins slowly counter-clockwise, symbolizing the rotation of the universe. The right palm faces up to receive Allah's grace, while the left palm faces down to spread it to creation (Falah, 2015). Spinning over long duration indicates high consciousness and increased self-awareness of a servant before the Creator (Krisgianto et al., 2022). The mandatory aspect consists of spinning counter-clockwise from right to left, similar to tawaf. The developmental aspect includes specific body positions: right big toe pressing left big toe, crossed arms with right hand on top, head bowed resembling ruku' (Mufidah et al., 2023).

The recitation of shalawat (blessings on the Prophet) and dhikr such as "Allah," "Subhanallah," and "Alhamdulillah" before and during the dance serves both spiritual and psychological functions. These repetitive phrases anchor attention, prevent mind-wandering, and activate positive associations. The recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah as a wasilah (intermediary) provides ritual structure that may enhance placebo effects and meaning-making.

3.4.2 Effects: Empirical Evidence of Therapeutic Benefits

Based on a questionnaire conducted by Krisgianto and team on Sufi Dance practitioners, 70% of respondents felt positive psychological impacts. First, inner calm and peace of heart emerged. Respondents who previously experienced pressure from worldly problems felt changes after joining the Sufi Dance Studio. Second, behavioral transformation towards positivity occurred. Calm inner conditions affect how individuals respond to problems and their surroundings, evident in more patient attitudes, reduced rushing, quicker and more logical thinking, increased self-confidence, and better focus (Krisgianto et al., 2022).

In Misbah's writing, Sufi practices, including Sufi Dance, contribute to building a tolerant, moderate, diversity-appreciating, and compassionate life (Misbah, 2018). Sufism is understood as a way of life that brings humans closer to Allah by subduing desires and the personal ego (Ozturk, 2019). Makhasin added that Sufi movements have given birth to the concept of cosmopolitan pietism, with potential as a cultural foundation for democratic society in Indonesia (Sidi, 2019).

3.4.3 Potential Risks: Cautions and Limitations

While the psychological benefits are substantial, an academically balanced analysis must also discuss potential risks. First, dissociation risk: Extended spinning combined with repetitive dhikr may induce altered states of consciousness that, in susceptible individuals, could lead to pathological dissociation or depersonalization. Not every practitioner has the psychological resilience to integrate such experiences. Second, over-spiritualization of psychopathology: There is a risk that individuals with clinical mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety disorders, depression) might seek Sufi Dance as a substitute for evidence-based medical treatment, delaying or avoiding effective interventions. Third, dependency on ritual: Practitioners may become psychologically dependent on the dance to achieve calm states, potentially avoiding development of non-ritual coping strategies for everyday stressors. Fourth, physical risks: Spinning for extended periods carries risks of falls, dizziness, and musculoskeletal injury if not properly supervised(Karagözoğlu, 2018). These risks do not negate the benefits but should be acknowledged in any comprehensive assessment.

3.5 Integration: Cross-Perspective Synthesis and Conceptual Model

The preceding analyses from three distinct perspectives—Hadith, Qur'an, and Psychology—reveal an apparent dichotomy. On the normative side, Sufi Dance lacks a sound foundation as ritual Islamic worship (ibadah mahdhah) based on the primary sources of Sharia (Hannan dkk., 2024). The hadiths cited are either taken out of context, weak (da'if), or fabricated (maudhu'), and the Qur'anic verses do not provide direct legitimization. On the empirical side, Sufi Dance demonstrates substantial therapeutic benefits as a form of spiritual psychotherapy, including mental calmness, improved focus, behavioral positivity, and enhanced self-confidence.

To resolve this dichotomy conceptually, this study proposes an integrative framework called the Normative-Empirical Distinction Model (NED-Model) . The NED-Model distinguishes between three domains:

1. Domain of Ritual Worship ('Ibadah Mahdhah) : Practices that require definitive (qath'i) evidence from the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, with specific forms, times, and conditions prescribed by revelation. Sufi Dance does not belong here.
2. Domain of Cultural Expression (Adat wa Ta'bir Thaqafi) : Practices originating from local tradition that contain no religious claim to worship. Sufi Dance can be situated here when performed as cultural heritage, art, or meditative exercise without claiming sharia legitimacy.

3. Domain of Therapeutic Discipline (Tadawi Nafsi) : Practices with empirically verified psychological benefits, regardless of their religious or cultural origins. Sufi Dance belongs here based on evidence of therapeutic effects, as long as no haram elements (e.g., free mixing of non-mahram, intoxicants) are involved.

The central thesis of this study, formulated as an interdisciplinary contribution, is as follows: A practice may be therapeutically beneficial without being ritually prescribed, and culturally valuable without being doctrinally mandated. The conflation of these distinct domains—treating therapeutic benefit as evidence of worship status—constitutes a category error that leads to theological confusion (Azhary, Mashur, dkk., 2025). Conversely, rejecting the practice entirely based on its lack of ritual status overlooks its genuine psychosocial utility and cultural significance.

This thesis has both normative and empirical implications. Normatively, Muslims are advised to distinguish between what is prescribed worship (following the Sunnah) and what is permissible cultural expression (not contradicting sharia)(Afabih dkk., 2026). Sufi Dance, when stripped of claims to being a prophetic practice or form of mahdhah worship, is not inherently forbidden as long as it avoids sharia violations. Empirically, mental health professionals may consider Sufi Dance as a complementary intervention for stress reduction and self-regulation, without needing to endorse its theological claims. The model thus preserves sharia integrity while respecting therapeutic evidence and cultural pluralism.

In the Indonesian context, where Sufi Dance has gained popularity among youth as both spiritual expression and art performance, this model offers a balanced framework. It prevents the practice from being either uncritically embraced as worship or entirely rejected as deviation. Instead, it can be appreciated for its cultural and therapeutic contributions while maintaining clarity about its non-prescriptive status in Islamic law.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has critically reassessed Sufi Dance (Whirling Dervish) from three integrated perspectives: the Qur'an, Hadith, and Psychology. The findings demonstrate a clear distinction between normative legitimacy and empirical utility. From the Qur'anic perspective, no direct textual basis supports Sufi Dance as a prescribed form of worship. The verse QS. Sad: 33, often cited as evidence, is an analogical interpretation far removed from its literal meaning in authoritative exegesis. From the Hadith perspective, the narrations used as justifications are either contextually misapplied (such as the Abyssinians' spear-play on Eid), weak (*da'if*), or fabricated (*maudhu'*), while the distinction between spontaneous hopping (*hajl*) and ritualized dance invalidates claims of prophetic endorsement. However, from the psychological perspective, Sufi Dance demonstrates real therapeutic benefits as a form of spiritual psychotherapy, including mental calmness, improved focus, and positive behavioral changes.

Consequently, the main claim of this study is that Sufi Dance does not constitute a form of *'ibadah mahdhah* (ritual worship) based on *qath'i* (definitive) evidence from the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. It is, rather, a cultural heritage and a potentially beneficial therapeutic discipline, provided it is placed proportionally without being claimed as an integral or prescribed part of Islamic sharia.

The contributions of this study are twofold. First, the theoretical contribution lies in the development of the Normative-Empirical Distinction Model (NED-Model), which differentiates between three domains: ritual worship (*'ibadah mahdhah*), cultural expression (*adat*), and therapeutic discipline (*tadawi nafsi*). This model offers an interdisciplinary framework for evaluating similar practices that straddle normative and empirical claims. Second, the practical implication is addressed to two audiences. For Muslims, this study provides clarity to prevent theological confusion between what constitutes worship and what constitutes permissible cultural or therapeutic activity. For mental health professionals, the study acknowledges the empirically verified benefits of Sufi Dance as a complementary intervention for stress reduction and self-regulation, without requiring endorsement of its theological claims.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, as a library-based research, its findings are dependent on textual interpretation and the availability of primary sources; it does not include original empirical validation through clinical trials, surveys, or direct observation of Sufi Dance practitioners. Second, interpretive bias is an inherent limitation of any qualitative textual analysis; despite efforts to maintain analytical neutrality, the selection and interpretation of classical sources are shaped by the researcher's academic framework. Third, the hadith criticism applied in this study relies on the assessments of classical and contemporary hadith scholars; different methodological criteria among scholars may yield nuanced differences in authenticity rulings.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended in two directions. First, empirical field studies are needed to directly observe and document the lived experiences of Sufi Dance practitioners, including their motivations, subjective benefits, and understanding of the practice's religious status. Second, an experimental psychology approach employing pre-test and post-test designs with control groups could quantitatively measure the therapeutic effects of Sufi Dance on specific mental health outcomes such as anxiety reduction, attention regulation, and emotional well-being, thereby providing stronger causal evidence beyond self-reported questionnaires.

Regarding policy implications, this study recommends the development of clear guidelines for distinguishing between religious claims and cultural-psychological utility. Religious authorities (such as *ulama* and *fatwa* councils) are advised to issue nuanced clarifications that neither uncritically endorse Sufi Dance as worship nor entirely condemn it as deviation, but rather acknowledge its permissible status as cultural expression and therapeutic practice. Educational institutions and community organizations may integrate Sufi Dance as an extracurricular activity for character building and stress management, without presenting it as a religious obligation. Cultural policymakers are encouraged to preserve Sufi Dance as intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the Indonesian context where it has gained popularity, while ensuring that its presentation does not misrepresent it as an established Islamic ritual. This balanced approach preserves sharia integrity, respects therapeutic evidence, and promotes cultural pluralism without theological confusion.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to LP2M Ma'had Aly Hasyim Asy'ari Tebuireng for funding this research through the Excellent Research Grant Scheme for the 2025 Fiscal Year, under contract number 009/LP2M/MHA/V/2025. We also extend our deepest appreciation to the Editorial Board of IJOIS (Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies) , including the Editor-in-Chief, section editors, and all anonymous reviewers, for accepting this article and for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and support throughout the review and publication process. Special thanks go to KH. Muthohharun Afif for his insightful suggestions and critical input. We are also grateful to the entire academic community of Institut Tinggi Agama Islam Hasjim Asy'ari Tebuireng Jombang for providing a conducive academic environment. Finally, we acknowledge all parties who contributed morally and materially to the completion of this research.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently without any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as potentially influencing the results or interpretation of the findings presented in this article. All funding sources have been disclosed in the acknowledgment section, and there is no competing interest among the authors regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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