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## Sufi Breathing As A Relaxation Technique for Stress Management Control

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### Abstract

Stress is an emotional, physical, and mental reaction to a change in a situation that occurs frequently in human life. This condition has been identified as the cause of nearly all problems, including burden, pressure, anxiety, fatigue, conflict, panic, depression, and lethargy. Since the word "stress" has become a common human idiom, this issue requires immediate consideration. Although humans experience a variety of forms of stress, it must be overcome in any way because, if left unattended, it will cause damage to health and negatively impact the quality of daily life. In addition to calming the body and mind, relaxation techniques are also helpful. Researchers have discussed numerous relaxation techniques, including meditation, light exercise, favorite activities, and breathing. Therefore, this article will discuss the suggestions for relaxation techniques that can be made and practiced to control stress, namely the breathing technique known as "Sufi breathing" that is practiced by most Sufis. The technique involves precise, deep breathing and a high level of concentration on the sacred words that can induce relaxation in the practitioner. According to the findings, this technique can have an optimal effect on reducing the individual's stress and promoting his or her mental and emotional health. Even though Allah Almighty is the All-Healer, the individual must have faith in the technique and perform it with the expectation of receiving a blessing.

**Keywords:** Sufi Breathing, Stress, Relaxation, Islamic Psychospiritual, Tasawuf

### Introduction

When confronted with life's problems or challenges, such as the diverse effects and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, pressure or stress induce changes in routine or grip emotions. Many members of the community have experienced mental distress and the feeling that they are no longer able to continue living as they have in the past. Numerous people continue to be affected by this situation, despite the fact that the new normal has emerged. Some are even willing to commit suicide because they can no longer survive and believe that death is the solution to all of their problems and pressures.

Stress cannot be taken for granted because, if not properly managed, it can negatively impact an individual's mental health. From a psychological perspective, the term "stress" refers to a person who is experiencing anxiety or depression. Although there are numerous definitions of stress, the primary focus is on depression or being in a state of sadness that exerts pressure on an individual (Izzati et al., 2019). Stress is non-specific and can result in claims against one's body, affecting either the mental or somatic angle (Selye, 1956). Generally, there are two types of stress: eustress and distress. The term "eustress" refers to a type of stress that can have beneficial effects and act as a self-motivating agent (Everly & Lating, 2013). This uncertainty of stress does not, however, guarantee that the individual is always in a cheerful state, as it also carries the potential for stress. Distress is a form of stress that results in negative outcomes that can disrupt a person's health and lifestyle, including cognitive, emotional, psychological, and behavioral changes (Harrington, 2013). Stress can be experienced by individuals of any gender, race, or age. Stress is almost certainly the cause of all mental disorders. The debate regarding the importance of the common perspective differs significantly from the discussion from an Islamic viewpoint. If such prevalent viewpoints utilize various theories and models for managing stress by first identifying factors and causes, the viewpoints are considered to be prevalent. The discussion of stress from an Islamic perspective, however, focuses more on the concept of the test itself and cites the Quran and the Hadith. In the Quran and Hadith, solutions to the aforementioned issues are also highlighted. Islam has addressed the structure of the human personality as well as its constituent elements. Every supposition human face originates from Allah Almighty in order to elevate the status and dignity of a servant in Allah's sights. As prescribed by Islam, the purpose of testing every slave is to find the best slave to populate Allah's paradise (Aziz, 2011).

Therefore there are many treatments that can be used to reduce stress, one of which is using Sufi breathing techniques. Sufi breathing is considered as a technique that all communities can use to help them reduce their stress and as an alternative treatment if they are stressed. With repeated use, this breathing technique may impact the human mind and emotions, providing a pleasant reaction stimulus to the human brain and emotions. This is a preliminary introduction in the form of a theoretical study based on a review of the literature.

### **Problem Statement**

Each individual has a unique response to, and perception of the stress encountered in life. These differences determine a person's failure or success, their ability to manage themselves, their family, and society, and their mental strength. Control and stress management were attained as a result of training, independence, and the passage of time in stages. Consequently, the time required for an individual to become proficient at stress management also varies depending on the type. Consequently, physical, mental, and spiritual stress must be managed using a variety of techniques and with proper planning (Noorsyafenas, 2016).

Stress is a mental issue that must be managed immediately to prevent it from escalating and making matters worse. Subsequently, it is natural that it be addressed immediately. Islam has taught many methods for treating and restraining human from the confusion of the soul, as outlined by Islam alongside human nature. The teachings of the prophets teach people how to approach Allah, as well as how to interact with people, animals, and nature as a whole. Humans are equipped with religious nature; without religion, the human soul would become void and lose composure (Aziz, 2011). Thus, by qualitative methods, the aims of this paper are as follows

- Discuss stress from an Islamic psychospiritual perspective.
- Highlighting the views of Sufism scholars regarding Sufi breathing
- Interpret how Sufi breathing can be applied to manage stress

### Methodology

This article gathers data through a literature review. The structure of this framework is based on the collection and analysis of literature references. The researchers gathered data using theme analysis methods based on multiple themes of stress, Islamic psychospiritual and respiratory health, and *tasawuf* from library reference materials, specifically primary data. Researchers also conducted searches through academic book and journal databases. The concept of breathing in general is also borrowed from Western researchers to address the individual's current problems. Regarding stress-related issues, all concepts and findings are evaluated from the perspective of *tasawuf*.

### Research Findings

The main issue related to the research problem presented is the stress faced by individuals and the need for appropriate methods to deal with it in order to produce mental well-being. The following conclusions are highlighted to address the issue as a result of the study

#### 1. An Islamic Psychospiritual Perspective of Stress

Kadir (2014) stated that Islam views the stress faced by humans as an inseparable nature of life, this can clearly be seen as stated by Allah Almighty in Chapter al-Baqarah verse 155 which means:

*Translation: We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure—*

Ibn Kathir in his commentary (1420-1999) stated that Allah Almighty testifies his slaves with a little fear and hunger and some of the wealth vanishes and loses loved ones whether family, lovers, relatives or friends, as well as crops that do not produce fruits and vegetables as usual, then those who are patient in facing the test will be rewarded and those who otherwise will be punish by Allah Almighty.

Stress can arise in situations that are beneficial to the individual as well as those that are detrimental. This stress can provide individuals with the energy and motivation necessary to meet daily challenges at home and at work. The pressures that accompany success can motivate individuals to pursue greater challenges and achieve their desired objectives, such as meeting deadlines, sales-sales quotas, production goals, or acquiring new customers. Some people believe that the challenges they face are not as stressful because they are satisfied and happy when they overcome them, but there is no doubt that stress can have negative effects on humans (Juraimy, 2014).

In fact, Othman (2018) stated that Islam does not consider stress as a pressure that only occurs in the form of physiology, psychology or social environment but the stress faced by humans is a medium for a slave to draw closer to Allah Almighty as His saying in Chapter al-Anbiya' verse 35:

*Translation: Every soul will taste death. And We test you 'O humanity' with good and evil as a trial, then to Us you will 'all' be returned.*

According to this verse, Ibn Kathir (1420-1999) explained that the test in the verse refers to a test that comes in various forms whether it is in the form of hardship or pleasure. Ibn Kathir further explained that this test is a medium to test the gratitude and patience of the servants.

From the point of view of Islamic scholars, the life of a Muslim becomes an aspect of interest for them is a matter involving the heart (*al-Qalb*). This is because the heart (*al-Qalb*) plays a spiritual role in human life as a whole as stated by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH:

*Translation: "Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari)"*

Imam al-Ghazali gave the meaning of the heart (*al-Qalb*) into two, the first meaning of the heart is the physical heart which is a lump of flesh that is on the left part in a human being. While the second meaning of the heart is the spiritual heart which leads to the meaning of the fact of a person who has the ability to claim knowledge and bear responsibility for all commandments and prohibitions by Allah Almighty. Thus, the level of stress is influenced by the good and bad heart of a Muslim. More clearly, the level of stress experienced by a Muslim is according to the quality of their heart (Izzati et al., 2019).

## **2. Sufi Breathing Regarding Sufism Scholars**

According to Sukarni (2020) among the elements made up in humans are the elements of *al-nafs* and *al-ruh*. *Al-nafs* is an Arabic word which meaning to a human being who is always mixed with the lusts that are his companion. *Al-nafs* in humans is constantly concerned with satisfying the needs of the human body, which include food, wealth, sexual desire, emotional impulses, and other needs. All of these needs will be a priority for the human being as he or she lives in the world, but if they are based on lust, they will produce a wide variety of diseases, both physically and emotionally, especially in this study, which focuses on the most common disease experienced by humans, namely stress.

The guidance provided by religion should control lustful desires so that people do not suffer from these diseases. According to Ibn Kathir's interpretation, lust always leads to evil deeds, except for those who are protected by Allah Almighty from committing sins, and Allah is Most Merciful (Ibn Kathir, 1420-1999). Thus, it is evident that if lust is not governed by religion, it will lead people to do evil that can destroy the individual. *Tasawuf* has provided a method for assisting in the development of the human psyche by stating that it recalls how the evolution of *al-nafs* exists in all human behaviors, including personalities, characters, and behaviors. *Al-nafs ammarah*, which controls the human soul to fulfill the desires of passions filled with greed and corruption, is a lust that constantly draws people towards evil. This is a description of the state of lust that is said to represent egoism (Sukarni, 2020).

While the element of *al-ruh* is viewed as something that has existed in humans, the death of a human being is the final indication of the physical and mental nature of life. *Al-ruh* and *al-nafs* are frequently compared to their respective roles, but the reality is that the two elements are distinct, as the spirit can play a role in enhancing one's physical level, including human thought. Breath is the driving force of *al-ruh*; the beginning of breathing involves the exit of breath from the human body, implying a close relationship between human life and death. The need to *al-ruh* is comparable to the need to breathe. If there is no physical movement or mental activity, humans can still live, but if they lose their ability to breathe,

they will die in a very short time. Based on the results of a device known as an electroencephalograph, humans whose brain waves do not function but who are still alive are referred to as "brain dead". This demonstrates that there is an element or component that is more important to human life than mental and physical processes, and that element is *al-ruh* (Sukarni, 2020).

Considering the discussion, *tasawuf's* knowledge of breathing is a technique that can connect the human soul to breathing. Sufi breathing, which is always associated with the names of Allah Almighty and *dhikr*, is an important element that is accompanied by inhaling and exhaling.

According to Ekawaldi (2014), relaxation breathing is a breathing exercise that matches the correct breathing movements where the convergence of the individual's thinking can accelerate the healing process that reduces stress and anxiety, as well as maintaining and enhancing physical and mental health. According to Irham (2016), this breathing relates to *al-nafs*, as explained by Abu Bakar bin Al-Baqilani, who stated that *al-nafs* is life when it comes out, so it will be "breathing" until the breath is life or soul for human life. This breathing is also defined as the surrounding air that enters and exits the human body, aiding in the improvement of blood circulation and contributing to the enhancement of human survival. Every living thing, including humans, is required to breathe because life cannot exist without breathing activities. Breathing is a continuous process between inhalation and exhalation that allows humans to survive. Therefore, it can be said that breath is the first and last thing that gives meaning to every journey of life that occurs between the first and last breath.

The term "Sufi breathing" is derived from the words "breathing" and "Sufi" and refers to the process of exchanging gases between living organisms as well as the correct breathing rhythms where the convergence of the individual's thinking can accelerate the healing process that relieves stress and anxiety and can maintain the physical and mental health of the body. While Sufi breathing is the method and approach of a Sufi who connects themselves to Allah Almighty through breathing, the goodness of breathing can give Sufi members full concentration when connecting themselves to Allah Almighty in order to achieve inner peace and relaxation.

### 3. Sufi Breathing In Controlling Stress

Relaxed breathing is the technique of controlling the rate and depth of breathing, and when it is performed correctly, it can alleviate the stress that an individual is experiencing (Maimunah, 2011). Breathing training, according to William (2009), is a common therapy technique for anxiety and stress reduction. Breathing exercises induce relaxation when the breathing process slows down from within the diaphragm (abdominal muscles located under the lungs near the ribs) and produces a physiological effect as opposed to hyperventilation (rapid breathing), which stimulates the human autonomic nervous system. In fact, this breathing exercise is also utilized in the management of chronic anxiety associated with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and hyperventilation caused by sudden panic attacks. Additionally, this breathing exercise is very useful as one of the common relaxation techniques for individuals interested in learning stress management techniques for anxiety reduction. Breathing exercises are most likely to be beneficial for individuals with chronic anxiety symptoms, such as panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Certain chronic anxiety sufferers may be diagnosed with chronic hyperventilation, which contributes to their somatic anxiety symptoms. Therefore, breathing exercises are used to treat panic disorder by overcoming the hyperventilation that triggers panic attacks, as well as to prevent and control

panic attacks in the community. In contrast, in the case of generalized anxiety disorder, when the individual experiences anxiety or stress, diaphragmatic breathing can be used to induce a state of relaxation and alleviate the symptoms. (William, 2009).

In conclusion, these breathing exercises can be used as an alternative method of stress management. This is because regular and well-organized breathing affects a person's mind and emotions, allowing them to control stress in response to a problem.

In describing *sufi* breathing, the primary focus is on incorporating *sufi* practice into this breathing technique. Respiratory therapy involves directing the brain to focus on breathing activities in which a person is aware of the in and out of the air through the nose; this therapy is also used in *sufism* but includes the breathing activity with *zikrullah*, according to Lutfie's (2020) study, which states that the Tarekat community practices *dhikr hifz al-anfas* (keeping breathing). *Dhikr hifz al-anfas* is able to control one's bad intentions, such as abandoning worship, committing evil, and other things that cannot escape from the in and out of breath between the nose and mouth when a person is breathing, therefore it is necessary to be accompanied by *dhikr*, whether it is pronounced orally or in the heart, and performed continuously in each of the inhalations and exhalations. Among the recommended *dhikr* are the 99 names of Allah, as well as "*La ilaha illallah*," "*Allahu Akbar*," and numerous others. Therefore, the implementation of *dhikr* should not be limited to sitting in *dhikr* alone; rather, *dhikr* can be synthesized by any medical method, including the breathing method, in order to produce an effort that is more blessed by Allah Almighty until it produces results.

By reciting *dhikr*, a person who is depressed and pessimistic that it affects his daily life can heal the disarray of the soul and the unease of the heart. This is the case because *dhikr* calms the heart and eradicates misery. As Allah Almighty states in Chapter Al-Ra'd verse 28: "Only by remembering Allah Almighty will the heart be calm." Numerous studies indicate that the practice of *dhikr* has a positive effect on its practitioner. *Dhikr* both energizes and calms the mind; those who are restless and unable to develop their souls will be energized and motivated. Therefore, the combination of breathing techniques and Sufi practice, i.e., *dhikr*, is a holistic and all-encompassing form of immediate treatment, as it is both physically and spiritually practical. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali extensively discusses a holistic discussion in Islam that incorporates physical and spiritual elements. Spirituality, as discussed by Imam al-Ghazali in his book, *Iy' 'Ulm al-Dn*, is comprised of four elements: *Al-qalb* (heart), *Al-'aql* (mind), *Al-nafs* (lust), and *Al-ruh* (spirituality), with *Al-qalb* serving as the primary foundation. Therefore, to achieve physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being, each of these spiritual elements is intertwined with the others.

This Sufi breathing technique is also a component of a common breathing technique that aims to influence the emotions and mind. It is a relaxation breathing technique in which breathing is regulated and performed in a regular, deep, and proper manner. This can reduce stress, and when used, relaxation breathing becomes an active coping skill. When this Sufi breathing is practiced when experiencing stress, pressure, or anxiety, it reduces the physical response and calms the body, and when the body is calm, it has a positive effect on the state of mind. Quiet breathing is a technique that can help you breathe and reduce mental pressure.

This method of relaxation breathing utilized in Sufi breathing is seen as a factor in a person's ability to control stress. This is because this method, when combined with *dhikr*, can affect a person's emotions and mind. In addition, a person who performs this Sufi breathing technique is able to focus his heart on the meanings of the *dhikr* by focusing on the fact that all hardships and tests are from Allah Almighty and that the human will return to Him to ask

for assistance and to express gratitude. This situation will motivate a person to think and speak positively, and it will lead to a change in one's thought processes toward a better and more rational nature. After repeated training, both the body and the mind will feel calm and at ease.

### **Application of Sufi Breathing**

Listed below are the steps involved in Sufi breathing

First, the individual must perform ablution and select a location free from disturbances. Then, assume a sitting position on a chair or a prayer mat. If required, close your eyes. Then, slowly inhale air and exhale it through the nose.

Then, select the commonly known 99 names of Allah or the commonly used short *dhikr*. Common examples include "Allah, Allah" and "Lailahailallah". Begin to concentrate on your breathing and say "Alhamdulillah" to Allah Almighty for the blessings of life.

Say "Allah" with the extended form "Allaaaaah" when inhaling and exhaling, and live the existence of Allah, the Most Merciful, Compassionate, and Forgiving.

When breathing is normal, continue to say "Allah" while holding your breath and exhaling.

The breathing technique should be performed four times or continuously until the individual's body feels at ease and his mind becomes calm. When you're done, say "Alhamdulillah".

### **Conclusion**

The role of *tasawuf* in human life is frequently a source of concern due to its nature as a very helpful field, particularly in guiding people to purify their hearts from all the impurities of evil, which are one of the main causes of the stress that every individual frequently experiences. When discussing the theory, methods, and practicalities of *tasawuf*, western scholars could not avoid discussing the theory when expressing their opinions on *tasawuf* itself. To continue a life of deception and insurrection, the community faces new challenges and suppositions with each passing day, which puts the community under a great deal of pressure. However, there are some people who are unable to control their stress, and this can lead to a variety of psychological, cognitive, emotional, and other problems, such as confusion of the soul, involvement with immorality symptoms, and other things that can be detrimental to their lives. Thus, scholars and *tasawuf* took various approaches in *tasawuf*'s knowledge to prevent people from experiencing it, including the Sufi breathing method, which based on the concept and practice of Sufi members.

Sufi breathing is viewed as a method that is easily practiced by all communities, making it a means of stress management that can also be used as an early and quick treatment if they experience stress. The Sufi breathing method, which uses holy words that glorify Allah Almighty, is a technique that can keep the human mind and emotions from being perpetually depressed because the brain and emotions receive a positive response when the good words are repeated. As a result, people will be more productive and positive. The role of *tasawuf*, which assists humans in removing all soul damage, can prevent the individual from readily accepting the negative elements that cause stress. Taking the Sufi breathing method, which is directly connected to the human mind through inhaling and exhaling and positive expressions, will cause the human brain to return to rationality, allowing individuals to face all challenges and hypotheses without being overcome by the stress that incriminates them. This paper helps individuals understand Islamic scholars' perspectives on stress and one of the Islamic methods that may be applied as a relaxation technique to control stress, Sufi



breathing. These findings can also be used to guide future research in the field of psychotherapy and community counseling.

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