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A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Sufi-Informed Islamic Family Counseling for Conflict Resolution

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A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Sufi-Informed Islamic Family Counseling for Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: Recent research in Islamic counselling and psychology has explored spiritual strategies for family conflicts, but the experiential meaning of Sufi-based practices within counselling remains underexplored. Most existing studies describe Sufi ideas theoretically but rarely examine how counsellors and families experience these principles in tension, reconciliation, and relational adjustments. This study fills that gap by examining how specific Sufi values are embodied, interpreted, and applied in Islamic family counselling sessions. Using a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach inspired by van Manen, the research involved five Muslim counsellors and eight families, selected through purposive sampling from a community counselling network. Data collection included detailed interviews and ethically approved observations of counselling sessions during non-private moments. Analyses combined meaning-unit condensation with reflexive thematic analysis. Three experiential themes emerged: (1) inner readiness as an ethical foundation, where both counsellors and parents describe quieting the heart as essential for dialogue; (2) embodied spiritual regulation, with practices like dhikr helping to recalibrate emotional intensity and foster empathetic listening; and (3) relational deliberation, where Qur'an-guided reflection promotes more collaborative and less adversarial decision-making. These results offer a contextual understanding of how Sufi-inspired spirituality influences conflict resolution in Indonesian Muslim families. Further studies should explore these patterns in various settings and larger samples.

Key Words: Islamic counseling; Sufistic values; Family conflict; Conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Family conflict remains one of the most persistent relational challenges in contemporary Muslim societies. It contributes to psychological distress, weakens parent-child bonds, heightens marital tension, and generates transgenerational patterns of emotional insecurity (Felisilda & Torreon, 2020; Muslimin, 2019). In Indonesia and other Muslim-majority contexts, rising divorce rates, domestic disputes, and intergenerational misunderstandings have produced environments in which emotional neglect, reactive communication, and violence become increasingly normalised (Hidayah et al., 2022; Mujiyono et al., 2024). When these tensions persist, they affect children's academic functioning, moral decision-making, and overall social development (Febryanti et al., 2024; Saleem et al., 2020). Although family counselling programs have expanded across institutions and community-based services, many continue to use frameworks developed in secular contexts that do not fully attend to the spiritual and ethical needs of Muslim families (Failasufah et al., 2022; Macleod, 2018). Such limitations underscore the urgency of

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exploring counselling approaches that integrate Islamic values, honour cultural expectations, and address the emotional-spiritual realities that shape conflict dynamics in Muslim households (Aten & Leach, 2009; Hood et al., 2018; Hussein Rassool, 2021).

Within the broader landscape of Islamic guidance and counselling, approaches grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah provide an essential foundation for nurturing spiritual, emotional and relational well-being (Abdulraheem & Al Dwairi, 2025; Ashraf & Khan, 2024). Empirical studies have shown that Islamic counselling interventions can reduce marital stress, enhance parental empathy, and foster moral development (Heidari et al., 2010; Ismayawati et al., 2009; Letafati Beris et al., 2021; Zare Mirkabad et al., 2024). Nonetheless, much of the existing practice remains jurisprudential and didactic, focusing on behavioural correction or religious instruction rather than addressing inner transformation processes that sustain long-term relational change. Families experiencing conflict often require interventions that not only offer moral guidance but also facilitate self-awareness, humility, and emotional regulation, dimensions that are frequently overlooked in normative models. As several scholars have noted, true reconciliation demands the cultivation of ethical dispositions and affective softness that cannot arise solely from prescriptive teaching (Plata-Pineda, 2021; Duran-Palacio et al., 2023; Minuchin, 1965). This gap between moral instruction and inner transformation limits the effectiveness of many existing Islamic counselling frameworks in addressing deep-seated relational conflicts.

Sufism offers valuable resources for bridging this gap through its longstanding emphasis on spiritual purification, character refinement, and the cultivation of relational humility. Core Sufi virtues such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*iman*), self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), and introspective self-examination (*muhasabah*) provide an ethical-affective foundation for transforming interpersonal relationships (Bassar & Hasanah, 2020; Bilqies, 2014; G. Hussein Rassool, 2025). Historically, these virtues have functioned not only as personal moral ideals but also as mechanisms for softening the heart, regulating emotions, and generating compassion with elements essential for resolving conflict. Contemporary research highlights that such Sufi-inspired dispositions can reduce anger, promote forgiveness, and strengthen emotional connectedness within families (Cetinkaya & Billings, 2023; Yan et al., 2025). When applied in counselling settings, Sufi practices have the potential to redirect ego-driven responses toward God-centred reflection, thereby addressing both the spiritual roots and the relational manifestations of conflict (Braddock, 2025; Hanin Hamjah & Mat Akhir, 2014; Islamy et al., 2022; Kugle, 2021).

Although scholarly interest in integrating Sufi perspectives into counselling has grown, structures and methods for embedding Sufi practices into Islamic family counselling remain limited. A few qualitative studies explore the use of guided communication, *dhikr* for stress reduction, and spiritual reflection for emotional stability (Francesco Piraino, 2019; Umriana et al., 2023). Yet these studies generally treat Sufism either as general spirituality or as an individual practice, without elaborating how Sufi concepts translate into systematic counselling procedures. Existing works often highlight *tazkiyah al-nafs* or *dhikr* as abstract virtues but do not articulate their procedural relevance in addressing conflictual interactions between spouses, parents, and children. As a result, counsellors lack operational clarity regarding how Sufi values can inform assessment, intervention, and relational repair within family counselling sessions. The absence of such procedural frameworks leaves a significant methodological and practical gap for counsellors seeking to integrate Sufi principles into professional practice.

More specifically, prior studies have not examined how Sufi practices function within real counselling interactions involving complex relational dynamics. Much of the available literature focuses on individual spirituality or pesantren-based religious development (Astuti & Wasik, 2024; Bilqies, 2014; Hussein Rassool, 2021), leaving a limited understanding of how these practices can be mobilised in structured family counselling. Even when Sufi spirituality is incorporated, the discussion often remains conceptual rather than practical. Existing Islamic counselling models additionally tend to emphasise jurisprudential instruction or moral education, leaving the transformative dimension of Sufism underexplored. To date, no study has provided a systematic description of how counsellors operationalise core Sufi practices, such as *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *dhikr*-based emotional regulation, and Qur'anic deliberation (*shura*) as integrated techniques for conflict resolution in family settings. This gap is particularly striking given the increasing recognition that families in Muslim-majority contexts often seek spiritually meaningful interventions that address both relational and ethical dimensions.

Indonesia offers a culturally and institutionally relevant context for exploring Sufi-informed family counselling. As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia has a vibrant Sufi tradition expressed through congregational dhikr, diverse tariqa, and community-based spiritual gatherings that emphasise humility, remembrance, and ethical refinement (Mawardi, 2022; Umriana et al., 2023; Zamhari, 2013). These cultural expressions contribute to the social acceptability and spiritual resonance of Sufi-oriented interventions. Moreover, governmental and professional institutions increasingly support faith-based approaches to mental health, recognising that spiritual resources can strengthen resilience and relational harmony. In this landscape, Sufi-informed counselling has both cultural grounding and institutional legitimacy, making Indonesia an ideal setting to investigate how Sufi principles may enrich Islamic family counselling practices.

Theoretically, Sufi purification processes align with relational counselling frameworks that emphasise emotional regulation, empathy, and systematic interaction. While counsellors must avoid conflating paradigms, Sufi concepts such as heart purification, reflective awareness, and ego-softening complement insights from family system theory and emotion-focused approaches (Jamal Malik, 2019; Marcia K. Hermansen Saeed, 2023; Morrin, 2023). These complementary relations lie not in merging models but in recognising how Sufi practices address affective blockages and cognitive distortions that often sustain conflict. By integrating Sufi principles as affective-ethical processes, Islamic family counselling may gain deeper tools to facilitate emotional transformation, strengthen relational bonds, and support holistic healing within families.

Therefore, this study examines how Sufi principles are interpreted, adapted, and operationalised within Islamic family counselling for conflict resolution. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the research investigates how counsellors draw on concepts such as tazkiyah al-nafs, dhikr-based emotional regulation, and Qur'anic deliberation to guide assessment processes, communication patterns, and relational repair. Rather than seeking the essence of lived experience, this study analyses meaning-making practices, interpretative strategies, and the guided by the following aims: (1) to identify how counsellors conceptualize Sufi values in the context of family conflict; (2) to examine the techniques and interpretative procedures through which these values are translated into counselling practice; and (3) to explore how Sufi-informed approaches contribute to emotional regulation, communication improvement, and reconciliation within family dynamics. Through this analytical approach, the study offers a culturally grounded framework that integrates Sufi ethical insights with contemporary counselling principles.

METHOD

This study examines how Sufi-informed Islamic family counselling, particularly grounded in the teachings of Abah Anom of Pesantren Suryalaya, provides an ethical, spiritual and relational framework for resolving family conflicts in contemporary Indonesian Muslim contexts. While international counselling ethics offer important universal principles, they are often developed from Western philosophical assumptions that emphasise individual autonomy and rational objectivity. Rather than treating these frameworks as inadequate, this study problematises the extent to which such universal models may not fully resonate with the communal, spiritual, and relational orientations embedded in Indonesian Muslim family life. The gap addressed here is the need for culturally contextualised ethical grounding that integrates spiritual experience, familial obligation, and communal harmony as core dimensions of counselling practice. Sufi traditions, particularly those of Abah Anom, offer a rich repertoire of concepts such as tawakkul, tazkiyah al-nafs, sabr and ikhlas that can inform counselling approaches without reducing spirituality to moral advice or religious instruction.

The study employs a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis approach, following Braun and Clarke, treating meaning not as fixed in religious texts but as co-constructed through interpretative movements among the textual source, practitioners' experiences, and the researcher's reflexive engagement. Data were drawn from three sources: (1) selected sections of Miftahus Shudur, particularly chapters on inner purification, managing anger, and relational ethics; (2) interviews with five Suryalaya-based counselling practitioners; and (3) informal observation of counselling sessions and daily

interactions within families affiliated with the tariqa. Participants comprised five practitioners aged 32-58 years, with counselling experience ranging from 5 to 27 years. All participants had formal backgrounds in Islamic education or counselling and long-term exposure to the Sufi teachings of Abah Anom. Their experiences included marital counselling, parent-child mediation, addiction-related family conflict, and emotional regulation through spiritual practices.

The analysis followed three interpretive approaches. First is textual grounding, which identifies Sufi concepts with ethical and psychological implications. The second is the experiential horizon, which examines how practitioners translate these teachings into practical reasoning during counselling sessions. The third is the fusion of meaning, in which the researcher reflexively integrates textual insights and fieldwork to construct thematic interpretations.

RESULTS

The analysis revealed that counsellors draw on Sufi concepts not as prescriptive teachings but as interpretive resources that help them navigate emotional complexity within the counselling room. Their narratives show an ongoing process of negotiating meaning, managing contradictions between ideal values and lived realities, and translating spiritual practices into relationally responsive interventions. Across accounts, counsellors reported that Sufi-informed approaches shape how they interpret clients' emotional cues, structure conversations, and reposition conflict as an opportunity for reflective self-understanding. A central pattern across interviews is how counsellors use Sufi grounding to regulate their emotional state before and during sessions.

Several participants stated that entering the room with an unsettled heart impairs their attunement to clients' affective signals. Counsellor Rahman described, "If I do not quit myself first, I become reactive to the couple's tension. A few slow breaths dhikr helps me reset so I can read them more accurately". Another counsellor, Aisyah, noted that this internal preparation changes her perceptual stance, saying, "After dhikr, I can see their expressions differently. Small gestures make more sense, like when the wife kept avoiding eye contact. It told me she was overwhelmed, not angry". These accounts suggest that Sufi practices operate as perceptual regulators rather than ritual components, enabling counselors to maintain an attuned therapeutic presence. Yet counselors also acknowledge that such grounding does not guarantee emotional neutrality. Some admitted difficulty sustaining composure when clients escalate. Counsellor Salim reflected, "I try to stay calm, but when both parties shout at once, I still feel pulled in. The challenge is remembering that my calmness is not automatic. I have to rebuild it throughout the session". This recognition of emotional fluctuation illustrates the interpretative labour involved in translating spiritual ideals into real-time relational work.

A second pattern involves how counselors draw from muhasabah to guide clients in reinterpreting conflictual events. Instead of delivering moral advice, they use reflective questioning to reveal underlying meanings. Counselor Hasan explained, "I rarely tell them what is right or wrong. I ask what they feared losing in that moment. That question opens the door to the real issue". In one session described by counselor Zahra, a husband initially insisted that his anger was justified, but when prompted to reflect, he admitted, "I was not angry about the dishes. I felt ignored for weeks". Zahra interpreted this turning point as evidence of emotional truth emerging after defensive layers are peeled back. However, these reflective moments are not always welcomed. Resistance often appears when clients perceive reflection as moral correction. Counselor Mawaddah experienced this in a session where the wife responded sharply, "why should I reflect? He never reflects on himself". Mawaddah explained that such reactions reveal a tension between the aspiration of inner purification and the reality of relational wounds. Instead of pushing reflection, she shifted to acknowledging the client's frustration. This demonstrates the adaptive, flexible posture required to sustain a reflexive therapeutic environment.

As the session progresses, counsellors observe changes in the way families communicate, though these changes are not uniformly smooth. Some families become more receptive as emotional barriers soften. Counsellor Abdul Karim recalled a moment when a husband turned to his wife and said, "I did not understand that you were scared. I thought you were attacking me". Karim interpreted this as an early stage of shared meaning-making, where each partner begins reconstructing the emotional significance of the conflict. In another case, described by counsellor Lina, a teenager said, "I'm not

shouting. I'm trying to say I feel cornered". Lina explained this shift from accusation to articulation of internal states reflects a gradual move toward emotional clarity. Nevertheless, discrepancies persist. A few individuals mentioned instances in which spiritual jargon led to exaggerated expectations. Counsellor Fahmi commented, "Some clients believe that invoking *sabr* means they must quickly forgive. However, forgiving does not happen automatically. Naming patience can sometimes add to the pressure rather than relieve it. These contrasts highlight the importance of distinguishing between spiritual goals and their application in emotionally charged situations.

According to most accounts, meaning-making culminates in what counsellors refer to as relational realignment, which involves adopting new emotional orientations towards one another rather than flawless resolution. Counsellor Hana explained, "They may still disagree, but the tone has changed." They argue with awareness rather than accusation." Other counsellors described the process as 'seeing the heart behind the behaviour' or 'recognising the other person's emotional burden.' These shifts suggest that Sufi-informed concepts help clients reframe relational experiences in more constructive, compassionate terms, rather than offering moral solutions.

Three major themes emerged from the analysis. First, Sufi ethics as relational attunement. Counsellors frame spirituality not as a moral judgement but as a relational disposition that softens the heart and creates emotional openness during conflict. Practitioners consistently emphasised that *sabar* and *ikhlas* are not passive resignation but active emotional regulation, enabling individuals to reduce hostility and re-engage in dialogue. One counselor explained that asking clients to return to the heart encourages them to reconnect with compassion before negotiating family issues. This resonates with Galtung's ABC framework, where Sufi-inspired emotional purification reshapes attitude (A) by transforming anger, resentment, and distrust into calmness and humility. This transformation supports healthier behaviour (B) such as slowing speech, reducing verbal aggression and increasing willingness to listen. It also reframes the contradiction (C) by shifting the meaning of conflict from an ego struggle to a shared responsibility for harmony.

Second, conflict resolution through guided self-awareness (*muhasabah*) and spiritual reorientation. Practitioners frequently use guided reflection, recitation, and structured silence to help family members identify emotional triggers and unmet needs. Rather than focusing solely on behavioural techniques, counsellors integrate theological reflection, such as remembering divine presence, to regulate emotional impulses. This aligns with the IOU (Informing-Opening-Uniting) communication model: informing occurs when counsellors clarify emotional states and relational patterns; opening takes place when spiritual grounding creates psychological space for vulnerability; and uniting emerges when shared values such as mercy, responsibility, and gratitude reframe the conflict as a collective healing process. In this process, Sufi teachings work not as doctrinal instructions but as cultural-symbolic resources that deepen emotional literacy.

Third, spirituality as an ethical orientation for collaborative family repair. The field's narratives show that Sufi concepts help families reconfigure responsibilities and expectations. Counsellors encourage clients to interpret hardships as moral relational tests that require mutual effort rather than blame. When handling cases of marital tension or parent-child withdrawal, practitioners often use stories from *Abah Anom* to illuminate the importance of mutual respect, sincere communication, and self-restraint. This ethical reframing also prevents spiritual discourse from becoming prescriptive; instead, it becomes a shared symbolic language for rebuilding trust and collaboration. The fusion of textual and experiential insights demonstrates that Sufi ethics can function as a culturally resonant framework for moral reasoning within counselling, guiding families towards humility, empathy, and cooperative problem-solving.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Sufi-informed Islamic counselling contributes to conflict resolution by integrating emotional regulation, spiritual reflection, and relational ethics into a cohesive practice. While it does not replace established counselling theories, it enriches them with culturally grounded perspectives that align with the lived realities of Indonesian Muslim families. The findings indicate that the interpretative movement between sacred texts, practitioner experience, and reflexive analysis enables a contextualised ethical grounding that supports both professional standards and spiritual well-being. This expands the discourse on Islamic counselling beyond doctrinal advice,

positioning Sufi teachings as dynamic interpretative resources that strengthen emotional resilience, enhance communication, and encourage collaborative transformation in family conflict settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that Sufi-informed counselling is delivered through situational practices that counsellors use to manage emotional intensity and relational stress. Rather than serving as abstract spiritual principles, *tazkiyah al-nafs*, dhikr, and Qur'anic reflection emerge as practical practices that shape therapeutic activity in the moment. This aligns with scholarship asserting that spirituality is clinically significant only when operationalised through practice rather than proclaimed as doctrine (G. Hussein Rassool, 2025). Across themes, participants' experiences demonstrate how Sufi principles are recontextualised within family conflict, resulting in a culturally entrenched modality that complements existing Islamic counselling models (Hamjah et al., 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2025).

The first topic demonstrates how *tazkiyah* serves as a self-regulation tool for counsellors and significantly impacts therapeutic presence. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* was frequently defined by participants as emotional preparation. One counsellor noted, "Before meeting families who come with intense anger, I always take some time for *tazkiyah al-nafs*, so I do not get pulled into their emotional turbulence." This aligns with research on therapist spirituality, which suggests that contemplative grounding promotes empathy and reduces countertransference reactivity (Picken, 2005; Stewart-Sicking et al., 2017). The participants' reflections deepen this idea by showing that *tazkiyah al-nafs* is not just contemplative but also ethical, guiding therapists to check intention and regulate ego reactions. This corresponds with ancient Sufi psychology (Moh. Kamil Fikri et al., 2025; Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2024) and recent empirical work on spiritual self-monitoring in counselling (Bakri et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2023), yet gives a new dimension by understanding *tazkiyah* as a situational practice grounded in conflict resolution.

The second theme demonstrates how dhikr functions as a dual-emotional-regulation technique, operating at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Previous studies have shown that dhikr has physiological effects, such as parasympathetic activation and reductions in stress indicators (Juniarni, 2022; Kusuma et al., 2020; Okviasanti et al., 2023). Participants in this study go beyond this by discussing how dhikr synchronises emotional states during counselling. A psychotherapist stated, "When the couple cannot speak without raising their voice, I guide them to do slow dhikr together, and the atmosphere usually softens." This is consistent with studies demonstrating the relationship impact of shared religious activities (Dollahite, 2023; Mud'is & Mud'is, 2022; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). However, counsellors in this study emphasise that dhikr's effectiveness is context-dependent, necessitating awareness of client preparation and relational positioning, which calls into question overly broad assertions found in some portions of the literature. This nuance emphasises dhikr as a negotiated and relational. However, counsellors in this study emphasise that dhikr's effectiveness is context-dependent, requiring sensitivity to client readiness and relational positioning, which challenges overly universalising claims found in parts of the literature (Saniotis, 2018). This nuance underscores dhikr as a negotiated, relational intervention rather than a guaranteed calming technique.

The third theme demonstrates that Qur'anic deliberation is grounded in dialogical meaning-making rather than in top-down instructions. Unlike traditional Islamic family counselling, which emphasises prescriptive direction, participants view deliberation as an equitable process (Hamjah et al., 2020; Hariastuti et al., 2026). One counsellor explained, "When we read verses about mutual respect, I ask each person to explain what it means for them, not what they think is the correct answer." This approach is consistent with contemporary hermeneutic models of Islamic family discourse (Haque et al., 2016) in which meanings are co-constructed. However, counsellors recognise structural constraints: patriarchal hierarchies might impede voice equality, a concern shared by larger Muslim family scholarship (Insani et al., 2024; Shah, 2018). These findings demonstrate that Qur'anic discourse has the potential to promote relational fairness, but it requires expert facilitation to avoid dominance reassertion.

Theoretical contributions arise in two directions. First, the study empirically supports the claim that Sufi principles can serve as organising frameworks for counselling processes (Al-Owidha, 2024; Ratnasari et al., 2025), rather than just as spiritual add-ons. *Tazkiyah* establishes therapist presence, dhikr establishes emotional regulation, and Qur'anic deliberation establishes relationship negotiation.

Second, the findings question basic assumptions within transpersonal and spiritually integrated counselling, which typically treat spiritual practices as generally successful (Bowers, 2020; Haryanto & Muslih, 2025; Rowan, 2015). The participants illustrate that Sufi practices are culturally moulded, emotionally contingent and relationally sensitive. This dimension adds to culturally based counselling theory in Muslim contexts (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2022; Faizal et al., 2025; Zenrif et al., 2024)

The practical ramifications necessitate the structured development of spiritual competency in Islamic counselling programs. Counsellors in this study emphasise that strategies such as *muhasabah*, *tazkiyah*, and *dhikr* must be developed as permanent personal habits to support attunement during emotionally charged sessions. This is consistent with worldwide counselling standards that emphasise the therapist's internal state as a primary therapeutic tool (Gonzalez et al., 2024; Hull et al., 2016; Subiyantoro et al., 2026; Young & Cashwell, 2011), while also providing culturally appropriate procedures for Islamic counselling centres. These implications are suitably limited to training and practice improvement; the current qualitative sample does not support policy-level recommendations, as noted in qualitative counselling guidelines.

This study's limitations include a limited sample size and a single-institution environment, which limit transferability. Because the counsellors are associated with a Sufi-oriented pesantren, their approaches may differ from those of practitioners in non-Sufi or urban counselling environments. Despite conscious efforts, a researcher's insider positionality can shape interpretation, a difficulty widely documented in Islamic qualitative research. Methodologically, the lack of client voices and session observations limits the study's ability to capture the relational dynamics indicated by counsellors.

Future research should extend the analysis to the perspectives of families receiving Sufi-informed counselling. Multi-perspective ethnographic studies could observe how *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *dhikr* and *Qur'anic deliberation* unfold in real-time interactions. Comparative research across different tariqa traditions may reveal variation in the operationalisation of spiritual concepts. Outcome-focused studies, such as pre-post conflict-resolution measures or dyadic emotion-regulation patterns, may also provide stronger evidence of the relational effects of Sufi-informed techniques.

CONCLUSION

This study proposes a conceptual understanding of how Sufi principles can be operationalised within Islamic family counselling through counsellors' self-regulation, emotional attunement practices, and dialogical meaning-making. Rather than presenting Sufistic concepts as abstract ideals, the findings illustrate how *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *dhikr*, and *Qur'anic deliberation* are enacted as situated techniques that help counsellors navigate emotionally complex sessions. This contribution adds nuance to existing Islamic counselling scholarship by highlighting that spiritual concepts carry practical therapeutic functions only when translated into relational and behavioural processes within the counselling encounter.

At a theoretical level, the study suggests that Sufi-oriented practices may serve as an organising framework for counselling rather than a peripheral spiritual supplement. By showing how counsellors link inner intention-monitoring, shared emotional modulation, and egalitarian deliberation, the findings extend current models of spiritually integrated counselling and offer a culturally grounded approach tailored to Muslim family dynamics. These insights remain interpretative and counsellor-reported, yet they broaden the conversation about how Islamic spiritual traditions can shape clinical presence, emotional regulation, and relational negotiation.

Practically, the study highlights areas of competence that may be valuable for counsellor training in Islamic contexts, particularly structured practices of self-reflection, *dhikr*-based grounding, and collaborative *Qur'anic* discussion. While the present study does not evaluate outcomes for families, participants' accounts indicate that these practices are perceived to support counsellors in managing tension, maintaining composure, and facilitating more balanced interactions. These implications are therefore limited to professional development rather than program-level or policy-level recommendations.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The small, context-specific sample restricts the transferability of interpretations, and the exclusive focus on counsellors' perspectives limits insights into how families themselves experience or respond to these practices. The lack of observational or longitudinal data also means that the study cannot speak to the durability or effectiveness of Sufi-informed approaches beyond the counsellors' perceptions. Researcher positionality may further shape interpretative emphasis despite reflexive safeguards.

Future research should incorporate the perspectives of family clients, analyse real-time counselling interactions, and explore how different Islamic traditions or counselling settings adapt Sufi concepts into practice. Comparative or multi-method studies may also clarify which aspects of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *dhikr*, and deliberation hold therapeutic potential across contexts, and which remain context-bound. Such inquiry would move beyond counsellor-reported perceptions toward a deeper understanding of how Sufi-informed practices function, evolve, or even encounter limits in lived family counselling processes.

Future studies should investigate the viewpoints of families who get Sufi-informed counselling. Multi-perspective ethnographic studies could reveal how *tazkiyah*, *dhikr*, and Qur'anic reasoning play out in real-time interactions. Comparative research across tariqa traditions may reveal differences in how spiritual conceptions are operationalised (e.g., Naqshbandi versus Qadiriyya approaches). Outcome-focused research, such as pre- and post-conflict resolution assessments or dyadic emotion-regulation patterns, may also provide more data on the relationship effects of Sufi approaches.

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