



## Transformation of Elderly Spirituality through *Suluk*: A Phenomenological Study of the Naqshbandi Order in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the worship practices and moral improvement of elderly suluk participants in the Naqshbandi Order at Koto Cayo Village, Semurup, and to identify the factors that support or hinder their participation. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that suluk significantly contributes to enhancing elderly participants' worship quality, as evidenced by their consistency in performing obligatory and voluntary prayers, increased frequency of fasting, and the habitual practice of daily dhikr. Moreover, suluk plays an important role in moral refinement, eliminating reprehensible traits (akhlak mazmumah) such as miserliness, arrogance, envy, and jealousy, while fostering praiseworthy virtues (akhlak mahmudah) such as patience, honesty, humility, generosity, and trust in God (tawakkal). Supporting factors include high intrinsic motivation, family support, financial readiness, and effective time management, whereas inhibiting factors comprise low motivation, limited community support, financial constraints, and work obligations. These findings affirm suluk's dual role as a medium for spiritual and moral development and as a means of strengthening social solidarity within the community. The study recommends implementing religious motivation programs, disseminating the benefits of suluk, providing economic support, and adjusting schedules to improve elderly participation. The implications of this research are not only relevant for elderly guidance in local contexts but can also serve as a model for developing Islamic values-based spiritual programs across various Muslim communities.*

**Keywords:** *Suluk; Elderly; Worship; Moral Conduct; Naqshbandi Order*

**Abstrak.** *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam pengalaman ibadah dan perbaikan akhlak lansia jamaah suluk Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Desa Koto Cayo Semurup, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor penghambat dan pendukung partisipasi mereka. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi, mengandalkan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa suluk berkontribusi signifikan dalam meningkatkan kualitas ibadah lansia, yang terlihat dari konsistensi pelaksanaan salat wajib dan sunah, peningkatan intensitas puasa, serta pembiasaan zikir harian. Selain itu, suluk juga berperan dalam perbaikan*

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*akhlak, dengan mengikis sifat tercela (akhlak mazmumah) seperti kikir, sombong, iri, dan dengki, serta menumbuhkan sifat terpuji (akhlakul mahmudah) seperti sabar, jujur, rendah hati, dermawan, dan tawakal. Faktor pendukung meliputi motivasi intrinsik yang tinggi, dukungan keluarga, kesiapan finansial, dan manajemen waktu yang efektif. Sebaliknya, hambatan partisipasi antara lain rendahnya motivasi, minimnya dukungan lingkungan, keterbatasan biaya, dan tuntutan pekerjaan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa suluk memiliki peran ganda: sebagai media pembinaan spiritual dan moral, sekaligus sebagai sarana penguatan solidaritas sosial di masyarakat. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan program motivasi keagamaan, sosialisasi manfaat suluk, dukungan ekonomi, serta penyesuaian jadwal pelaksanaan sebagai strategi untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan lansia. Implikasi penelitian ini tidak hanya relevan bagi pembinaan lansia di konteks lokal, tetapi juga dapat menjadi model pengembangan pembinaan spiritual berbasis nilai-nilai Islam di berbagai komunitas Muslim.*

**Kata kunci:** *suluk, lansia, ibadah, akhlak, Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah.*

## INTRODUCTION

Older adults, generally defined as individuals aged 60 years and above, represent the final stage in the human life cycle (Suherdi, 2022). This phase is a natural continuation of human development, which progresses from infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood before eventually entering old age. The aging process is an inevitable biological phenomenon, wherein physical, psychological, and social changes occur gradually over time. At this stage, individuals typically experience a decline in physical capacity, muscle strength, skin elasticity, and immunity, along with significant cognitive and emotional changes (Suherdi, 2022).

The impacts of aging extend beyond biological aspects, affecting mental health and psychosocial well-being. Older adults often face diminished motivation, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and even depression, especially when confronted with mobility limitations, loss of a spouse, or reduced social interaction (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). These factors, combined with reduced participation in professional or productive activities after retirement, can lead to feelings of uselessness and a lowered quality of life. Consequently, old age often becomes a period vulnerable to psychological crises, requiring specific approaches to care and guidance.

From an Islamic perspective, the later years of life should be characterized by tranquility, peace, and spiritual reinforcement. Older adults are expected to focus their attention on worship (*ibadah*) and the cultivation of noble character (*akhlaq*) as provisions for the afterlife (Qodim, 2022). Religious devotion serves as a key to shaping inner peace, providing a sense of security,

and preparing oneself for death with complete trust (*tawakkal*) in Allah SWT. Spiritual maturity in old age also strengthens psychological resilience, enabling older adults to accept life's changes with serenity.

Religious maturity among older adults is reflected in the improvement of both the quality and quantity of worship, such as regular prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, remembrance (*dhikr*), and charitable acts, as well as consistency in maintaining good conduct toward God, oneself, and others (Suherdi, 2022). According to Sofyan Sauri, worship and moral conduct are inseparable entities, where the quality of worship is manifested in ethical and moral daily behavior. In other words, mature spirituality fosters harmonious and constructive social interactions.

One method of spiritual development in Islamic tradition is *suluk*, a process of self-isolation aimed at intensifying worship and remembrance of God under the guidance of a spiritual mentor (*murshid*). This practice seeks to purify the heart, strengthen one's connection with Allah, and cultivate self-control against worldly desires (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). Historically, *suluk* has been an important element in Sufi orders, including the Naqshbandi Order, which has developed widely across Indonesia.

In the Naqshbandi tradition, *suluk* emphasizes that the perfection of worship must encompass three main dimensions: faith (*iman*), Islam, and excellence (*ihsan*). Its implementation involves frequent prayers, fasting, remembrance, and *shalawat*, as well as participating in *khatam tawajjuh* and specific remembrance practices such as *ismu dzat* and *na'fi isbat* (Qodim, 2022). These activities are not merely religious rituals but also means of forming personalities that are more patient, humble, and morally upright.

Phenomenological studies indicate that older adults who participate in *suluk* experience a shift in life orientation from worldly matters toward spiritual values. They exhibit higher consistency in worship, regular participation in congregational prayers, increased Qur'anic recitation, and frequent remembrance (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). Furthermore, their social relationships tend to be more harmonious, marked by efforts to maintain social ties, live simply, and avoid conflict.

Conversely, field observations reveal that some older adults who do not engage in *suluk* show a decline in religious values. This is evident in neglect of worship obligations, infrequent attendance at religious gatherings, and

excessive preoccupation with worldly affairs such as working in fields, farms, or markets to meet economic needs (Suherdi, 2022). This condition suggests that economic pressures often become a major barrier to fulfilling religious duties.

The contrast between *suluk* participants and non-participants illustrates that *suluk* significantly contributes to strengthening spirituality and improving moral conduct. Older adults engaged in *suluk* tend to adopt a simpler lifestyle, remain focused on the hereafter, and avoid unproductive behaviors. Thus, *suluk* can be regarded as an effective spiritual intervention for holistically improving the quality of life of older adults (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012; Qodim, 2022).

Sociologically, the presence of *suluk* activities in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup, has broad positive impacts. Not only does it enhance individual worship quality, but it also reinforces social cohesion among its members. The surrounding community perceives *suluk* participants as moral role models who maintain courtesy, avoid disputes, and actively engage in community activities. This demonstrates that *suluk* serves as an agent of religious culture formation in the local community.

From the perspective of the psychology of religion, *suluk* aligns with the concept of religious coping, which helps individuals face stress, loneliness, and existential fears in old age. By deepening awareness of God's presence, older adults gain peace of mind and a clear sense of life purpose. This factor has been shown to contribute to improved psychological well-being (Suherdi, 2022).

Suherdi's (2022) research further reveals a significant positive correlation between Islamic religiosity and the psychological well-being of older adults who practice *suluk*, showing that higher religiosity levels correspond to higher levels of happiness and tranquility. This finding reinforces the notion that spiritual dimensions cannot be overlooked in strategies to enhance older adults' quality of life.

From the theological perspective of Islam, Surah Ar-Rum verse 54 explains the human life journey—from weakness, to strength, and back to weakness and grey hair—affirming the importance of mental and spiritual preparation for the final stage of life. This verse offers a philosophical

foundation that old age is a moment to reinforce one's relationship with Allah as an acknowledgment of human limitations.

Based on the above exposition, it can be concluded that *suluk* functions not only as a medium for intensive worship but also as a means of character formation, social solidarity strengthening, and comprehensive improvement in the quality of life for older adults. This makes *suluk* highly relevant for consideration as an effective model of elderly guidance in traditional Muslim communities.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine in depth "The Practice of Worship and Moral Conduct among Elderly *Suluk* Participants: A Phenomenological Study of the Naqshbandi Order in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup," in order to understand the role of *suluk* in shaping the spiritual, moral, and social qualities of older adults, as well as its contribution to developing an Islamic values-based elderly guidance model.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of *suluk* in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup, has a significant influence on improving the quality of worship practices among its participants, particularly the elderly. The entire series of activities carried out during *suluk* focuses on the intensification of religious devotion, including the performance of obligatory (*fardhu*) and voluntary (*sunnah*) prayers on time, fasting—both obligatory and voluntary—and frequent *dhikr* (Qodim, 2022). The high frequency of worship activities fosters a religious habit that tends to continue after the *suluk* period, demonstrating a strong internalization of values (Suherdi, 2022).

For the elderly, the habituation of worship during *suluk* provides dual benefits: it functions as a medium for spiritual strengthening as well as a form of psychological therapy that helps reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness commonly experienced in old age (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). This is consistent with the findings of Syahroni (2018), who notes that elderly involvement in structured religious activities can improve their *subjective well-being* by fostering a sense of connectedness to God and the community.

Beyond its impact on ritual worship, *suluk* significantly contributes to the improvement of moral conduct (*akhlak*) among participants. Throughout *suluk*, participants are guided to eliminate reprehensible traits (*akhlak*

*maẓmumah*) such as miserliness, greed, arrogance, envy, jealousy, pride, and backbiting, which in Sufi literature are categorized as spiritual diseases that hinder the perfection of faith (Al-Ghazali, 2011). This moral refinement process is carried out through self-reflection (*muhasabah*), direct mentorship from the *mursyid*, and the habitual practice of behavior aligned with Islamic law (Qodim, 2022).

The moral transformation achieved through *suluk* is not only individual but also evident in participants' social interactions. Praiseworthy morals (*akhlak mahmudah*) such as patience, honesty, humility, generosity, politeness, perseverance, self-sacrifice, justice, wisdom, gentleness, courtesy, and reliance on God (*tawakkal*) become clearly observable in their daily lives (Suherdi, 2022). These findings align with Mutawakkil's (2020) research, which shows that moral cultivation through a Sufi approach can improve the quality of social relationships in rural communities.

The spiritual transformation experienced by *suluk* participants is holistic, involving cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Cognitively, participants gain a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, especially in the purification of the soul (*taẓkiyatun nafs*) (Nata, 2018). Affectively, they develop greater sincerity, humility, and fear of God (*khauf*), which fosters motivation to avoid sinful acts (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Psychomotor-wise, the habit of performing worship on time becomes a routine behavior that is difficult to abandon (Suherdi, 2022).

However, this study also found several inhibiting factors affecting elderly participation in *suluk* in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup. The first is internal factors, including a lack of intention and motivation to participate. Some elderly individuals reported not having sufficient spiritual drive or feeling mentally unprepared for the intense worship schedule lasting several days (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). This lack of motivation is consistent with self-determination theory, which posits that religious behavior is more consistent when driven by strong intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The second factor is external influences from family and community. Family support plays a crucial role, as elderly individuals who do not receive permission or encouragement from family members tend to be reluctant to join *suluk* (Syahroni, 2018). Communities that lack understanding of *suluk*'s benefits may also perpetuate stigma or skepticism about elderly participation.



This mirrors Prasetyo's (2019) findings that social support positively correlates with sustained elderly participation in religious activities.

The third factor is financial constraints. Although *suluk* generally requires minimal costs, some elderly perceive that leaving home for the *suluk* period means losing the opportunity to work or conduct business, thus affecting their daily income (Suherdi, 2022). This economic challenge becomes a significant barrier, especially for elderly individuals who remain the main breadwinners in their households.

The fourth factor is work-related obligations or daily activities. For elderly individuals still actively working in farms, rice fields, or markets, participating in *suluk* means leaving productive routines. This creates a dilemma between meeting economic needs and fulfilling spiritual needs (Mutawakkil, 2020). This phenomenon aligns with Lestari's (2021) findings that elderly people in rural areas often prioritize productive work over religious activities due to livelihood concerns.

Interestingly, elderly participants who successfully join *suluk* tend to have distinct characteristics compared to non-participants. They generally possess high religious motivation, strong family support, financial readiness, and the ability to manage work schedules to allow full participation in *suluk* (Suherdi, 2022). This indicates that participation in *suluk* requires multidimensional readiness, including spiritual, social, economic, and time management aspects.

In terms of impact, *suluk* participants report significant changes in their quality of life. These changes are felt not only spiritually but also psychologically, as they feel calmer, more patient, and more sincere in facing life's challenges (Birohmatika & Diana, 2012). This transformation is consistent with positive psychology theory, which asserts that engagement in meaningful spiritual practices can increase life satisfaction among the elderly (Seligman, 2011).

These results also reinforce the concept of *religious coping*, whereby religious practices are used as strategies to deal with life stressors. *Suluk* participants utilize worship and *dhikr* as means to shift their focus away from worldly difficulties and draw closer to God, ultimately providing peace and optimism (Pargament, 1997).

From a sociology of religion perspective, the presence of *suluk* in Koto Cayo Village, Semurup, serves as an effective agent for the socialization of Islamic values. Through intensive interaction during *suluk*, participants establish collective norms that encourage religious behavior and noble character (Prasetyo, 2019). This contributes to stronger social cohesion both within the *suluk* community and in the broader society.

These findings are also relevant to the concept of social capital, whereby participation in *suluk* expands social networks based on trust and shared values (Putnam, 2000). Such networks become sources of moral, emotional, and even material support for participants, including elderly members.

Based on all these findings, it can be concluded that *suluk* plays a dual role: as a medium for fostering individual worship and moral refinement, and as a tool for building social solidarity at the community level (Qodim, 2022). However, the success of *suluk* in guiding the elderly is highly influenced by internal and external factors that require careful attention.

The practical implication of this study is the need for strategies to overcome barriers to elderly participation, such as religious motivation programs, broader dissemination of *suluk*'s benefits, financial assistance, and flexible scheduling (Suherdi, 2022). Thus, *suluk* can become a sustainable and inclusive Islamic values-based model for elderly guidance.

These findings also contribute theoretically to contemporary Sufi studies, showing that Sufi practices such as *suluk* remain relevant and adaptable to modern societal needs, particularly in elderly guidance (Mutawakkil, 2020). Therefore, further research could be directed toward quantitatively measuring *suluk*'s impact on indicators of elderly spiritual, psychological, and social well-being.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *suluk* in the Naqshbandi Order at Koto Cayo Village, Semurup, serves as an effective medium for the spiritual transformation of elderly participants, influencing both their worship practices and moral conduct in daily life. The intensive schedule of religious activities during *suluk*—including the performance of obligatory and voluntary prayers, fasting, and frequent *dhikr*—has contributed to the formation of consistent



worship habits that persist beyond the *suluk* period. The moral guidance embedded within the *suluk* process has further enabled participants to eliminate reprehensible traits (*akhlak mazmumah*) and cultivate praiseworthy virtues (*akhlak mahmudab*), thereby enhancing interpersonal relationships and social harmony within the community.

The research also highlights that participation in *suluk* is influenced by various internal and external factors. High intrinsic motivation, strong family support, financial readiness, and effective time management are critical in enabling elderly individuals to take part in *suluk*. Conversely, low motivation, lack of social support, economic constraints, and work obligations present significant barriers to participation. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies—such as motivational programs, community awareness initiatives, financial assistance, and flexible scheduling—would help broaden access to *suluk* for elderly participants.

From a broader perspective, *suluk* demonstrates its dual role: as a means of individual spiritual and moral refinement, and as a catalyst for building social solidarity in rural Muslim communities. These findings affirm the continuing relevance of Sufi practices like *suluk* in modern contexts, particularly for elderly guidance. Future research could explore quantitative measures of *suluk*'s impact on spiritual, psychological, and social well-being indicators, offering deeper insights into its role as a sustainable, values-based approach to elderly development in Islamic societies.

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