Proceedings of The 3rd International Conference on Science and Islamic Studies
ISSN: 3024-9058 (Online - Elektronik)
Volume: 3, 2025
Publisher: Program Pascasarjana, UIN Alauddin Makassar

THE SUPREMACY OF SHARIA OVER HUMAN DESIRES (NAFS): A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF SELF-CONTROL IN ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY

Nurul Husaifah Ashikin[1], Aviva Riani[2], & Muhammad Syahriadi[3]

[123]Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar, Indonesia
Correspondence Email: avivariani58@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the supremacy of Sharia (Islamic Law) over human desires (hawa nafs) as a fundamental dynamic in shaping moral behavior. Sharia functions as a divine guideline regulating life to align with the will of God, whereas nafs represents internal urges that, if uncontrolled, lead to moral deviation. The conflict between these two forces determines the ethical direction of human life. Using a qualitative library research approach, this study analyzes the impact of desire on behavior from theological, psychological, and social perspectives. The findings indicate that while nafs is an inherent emotional and biological drive, it must be governed by the intellect ('aql) and the soul (ruh) through the mechanism of Taqwa (God-consciousness). The study concludes that upholding the supremacy of Sharia does not necessitate the annihilation of human nature, but rather guides it toward equilibrium and justice.

Keywords: Sharia; nafs (desire); islamic psychology; self-control; moral ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within every human being, there exist two opposing forces: Sharia as divine guidance and desire (*nafs*) as a worldly impulse. Sharia guides humans toward truth and equilibrium, while unchecked desires often propel them toward error and moral destruction. In the contemporary context, there is a growing phenomenon where individuals idolize their desires, viewing limitless freedom as an absolute right; however, this unrestricted liberty often serves as the root of social and moral decay. As the great Imam belonged originally to the Shafeyi Sunni sect, some of the religious doctrines will be found in line with that sect, but nevertheless its importance is very great. In his advanced age, the Imam was not a blind follower of sects but followed his independent thinking and as such indirectly created a sect of his own.[1]

The supremacy of Sharia over desires is a critical principle for humanity to remain within the boundaries of divine values and avoid behaviors that contradict their natural disposition (*fitrah*). Human behavior is shaped by internal and external factors, with desire defined as the emotional

---

[1] Revival Of and Religious Learnings, "Ihya Ul Um-Id-Din" I (n.d.).

Copyright © 2025: the Author(s)

and biological drive to fulfill physical or psychological needs. In philosophical and religious traditions, desire is viewed not as an entity to be destroyed, but as a force that requires rigorous control to prevent harmful actions.[2]

From an Islamic perspective, desire is a test. Uncontrolled *nafs* can lead individuals to sins such as greed and immorality. Conversely, when properly directed, desire serves as motivation to achieve positive goals· The fundamental challenge lies in management; humans face two paths—the path of truth originating from Allah and the path of desire often influenced by satanic whispers· As the source of potential misconduct, *nafs* is likened to a "horse-drawn carriage" whose reins must be held tightly to prevent it from straying· This study aims to examine the influence of desire on human behavior and the importance of self-control in shaping positive character through the lens of Islamic law.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative library research method to deepen the understanding of existing knowledge regarding Islamic psychology and law· Data was collected through a comprehensive literature analysis of primary theological texts (The Qur'an and Tafsir), Islamic philosophical literature (such as Al-Ghazali), and comparative psychological theories·

The analytical approach focuses on hermeneutics and content analysis to interpret the concept of *nafs* from religious, social, and psychological perspectives The study emphasizes the theoretical framework of self-control as the key mechanism for maintaining the balance between human urges and Sharia guidance·

3. RESULTS

The analysis reveals three key findings regarding the relationship between Sharia and human desires:

The Nature of Conflict between Divine Law and Inner Impulse

Sharia, etymologically meaning "the path leading to a water source," encompasses all aspects of life including worship (ibadah) and ethics (akhlaq). Its objective is to uphold justice (al-ʻadl) and prevent corruption (mafsadah). In contrast, hawa nafs implies a strong inclination that often contradicts reason and revelation25. The study finds that when humans make desire their primary guide (as warned in QS. Al-Jatsiyah [45]: 23), they lose moral direction. However, desire is not inherently evil; it functions as a motivator for survival and success when aligned with religious principles. Desire (nafs) is that which drives a person toward pleasure, sensual enjoyment, and various forms of lust that are prohibited by religion. Hawa nafsu also draws the heart toward conditions that are base and morally degrading.[3]

The Tripartite Model of Human Psychology

The research identifies that Islamic psychology posits a balance between three elements:

---

[2] Of and Learnings.

[3] Pada Kisah, Nabi Yusuf, and Dalam Al- Qur, “JURNAL TA ’ LIM, Volume 4 No. 2 Agustus 2022 1” 4, no. 2 (n.d.): 1–15.

The Intellect (*'Aql*): Acts as the controller and decision-maker based on consequences. The Soul (*Ruh*): The spiritual connection to the Creator, seeking eternal peace' Desire (*Nafs*)**:** The biological and emotional drive·

Disharmony occurs when *nafs* dominates the *'aql* and *ruh*, leading to a neglect of spiritual responsibility. An ideal human character is formed when these three work in harmony under the guidance of Sharia. Based on this understanding, the author considers it important to conduct a critical examination, both by comparing and by integrating conceptions of the human being in Islamic psychology and transpersonal psychology.[4]

Mechanisms of Control: Jihad An-Nafs and Taqwa

The study confirms that the primary mechanism for establishing the supremacy of Sharia is Jihad an-Nafs (struggle against the self). This internal struggle is prioritized over physical warfare. Practical implementations identified include:Worship: Fasting serves as training to restrain physical urges. Taqwa (God-Consciousness): Defined as self-protection from harm by obeying Allah36. It acts as an "inner fortress" where the fear of God creates a sense of ubiquitous surveillance, preventing individuals from succum bing to greed or lust By using this method, the understanding of the concept of emotional self-control in Islam becomes more complete and comprehensive, as it does not consider individual verses in isolation, but rather as an integrated and holistic perspective of the Qur'an.[5]

4. DISCUSSION

Comparative Perspectives: Islamic vs. Secular Psychology

From a psychological perspective, the findings parallel Sigmund Freud's theory of Eros (life instinct)38. Like Eros, nafs fulfills biological needs39. However, unlike secular psychology which may view suppression of desires as potentially harmful, Islam views the disciplining of desires as essential for "true happiness"40. Al-Ghazali's view that desire should be disciplined rather than destroyed 41 offers a bridge between rigid asceticism and modern hedonism The modern context increasingly underscores the urgency of studying the soul. Today's world is facing a deep-rooted moral crisis, spiritual barrenness resulting from materialism, and growing psychological challenges. Many individuals experience a sense of emptiness in life, despite material sufficiency.[6]

Socio-Moral Implications of Uncontrolled Desire

In the social sphere, the study highlights that unchecked desire manifests as greed for power, leading to corruption and injustice42. Social norms and laws function as external controls43, but Islamic Sharia provides an internal control system. The supremacy of Sharia ensures that personal liberty does not infringe upon public welfare (maslahah), The word faith comes from Arabic meaning faith and is often used to refer to belief in certain basic elements of a religious doctrine.[7]

---

[4] Perspektif Psikologi, Islam Dan, and Psikologi Transpersonal, *MANUSIA SPIRITUAL PERSPEKTIF PSIKOLOGI ISLAM DAN*, n.d.

[5] Muhammad Afif Bustaman, "Kekuatan Di Balik Kesabaran : Tafsir Tematik Tentang Pengendalian Amarah Dalam Al-Qur ' an Dan Sunnah," n.d.

[6] Muh Amri, "The Concept of the Soul in Islam and Modern Mental Health Challenges : A Comparative Philosophical-Sufistic Approach Konsep Jiwa Dalam Islam Dan Tantangan Kesehatan Mental Modern : Pendekatan Komparatif Filosofis- Sufistik" 2, no. 4 (2025): 552–77.

[7] "The Role of Islamic Psychology In Improving Self- Transcendence and Faith," 2022, 1–11.

Case Study Analysis: The Prophet Yusuf Archetype

The narrative of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) serves as the theological archetype for the supremacy of Sharia over desire. Despite facing intense seduction, his adherence to Taqwa allowed him to refrain from sin45. The analysis of Surah Yusuf [12]: 90 suggests that high status and divine protection are the results of combining patience (sabr) with piety (taqwa). This demonstrates that self-control is not merely a restrictive act, but a pathway to elevation and success. When he was young, Yūsuf (AS) had a dream where he saw eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrating before him. Qurʾānic commentators state that the eleven stars indicated his brothers while the sun and the moon indicated his parents.[8]

5. CONCLUSION

The supremacy of Islamic law over human desires is not a negation of human nature but a necessary framework for maintaining the balance between the intellect (*'aql*), the soul (*ruh*), and biological drives (*nafs*). This study concludes that while desire is a natural source of motivation, it requires the governance of Sharia to prevent moral and social decay. The integration of *Taqwa* functions as the ultimate self-control mechanism, transforming potential vices into virtues.

While this study is limited to a conceptual and theological analysis, it provides a foundational framework for understanding Islamic moral psychology. Future research should empirically validate these concepts through psychological studies on the correlation between spiritual discipline and social behavior in Muslim societies.

REFERENCES

Revival Of and Religious Learnings, "Ihya Ul Um-Id-Din" I (n.d.).

Pada Kisah, Nabi Yusuf, and Dalam Al- Qur, "JURNAL TA ' LIM, Volume 4 No. 2 Agustus 2022 1" 4, no. 2 (n.d.): 1–15.

Perspektif Psikologi, Islam Dan, and Psikologi Transpersonal, *MANUSIA SPIRITUAL PERSPEKTIF PSIKOLOGI ISLAM DAN*, n.d.

Muhammad Afif Bustaman, "Kekuatan Di Balik Kesabaran : Tafsir Tematik Tentang Pengendalian Amarah Dalam Al-Qur ' an Dan Sunnah," n.d.

Muh Amri, "The Concept of the Soul in Islam and Modern Mental Health Challenges : A Comparative Philosophical-Sufistic Approach Konsep Jiwa Dalam Islam Dan Tantangan Kesehatan Mental Modern : Pendekatan Komparatif Filosofis- Sufistik" 2, no. 4 (2025): 552–77.

"The Role of Islamic Psychology In Improving Self- Transcendence and Faith," 2022, 1–11. no. 3 (2022): 1–14.

---

[8] Sunnah Studies, Zakir Ahmed, and Noor Mohammad Osmani, "ِتذكِصد قن مِ. هٌ قِرِء ره قهلآا ذِنِ يِهِ لعِ ق ـْبله يل نَ ن لآْ غ ـَ ف لَ خِ سُ و نَ لآْ ك أْ ك وَ إِ نُ صَ" 6, no. 3 (2022): 1–14.