

## Article

# Classical Sufi Axiology as a Methodological Resource for Contemporary Family Studies: A Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Analysis

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**Abstract:** This article presents a systematic phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis of classical Sufi axiology as a methodological resource for contemporary family studies. Against the backdrop of postmodern axiological turbulence and the destabilization of family institutions globally, the study explores how the integral conceptual paradigm of classical Sufi tariqats – encompassing the teachings of al-Ghazali, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Naqshband, Yasawi, Kubra, and Makhdumi Azam – offers epistemologically valuable insights for modern family research. The investigation employs a triangulated methodology combining hermeneutic textual analysis of primary Sufi sources, comparative-conceptual analysis with Western phenomenological axiology (Scheler, Hartmann), and integrative-synthetic mapping with contemporary family theories (Gottman, Sternberg, Bowlby, Bronfenbrenner). The findings demonstrate that classical Sufi axiology operates through three interconnected dimensions – onto-metaphysical, gnoseological-irfani, and ethopoetico-praxiological – which collectively constitute a multilayered architecture for family well-being. The study identifies seven core axiological constants (love, patience, forgiveness, respect, mercy, fidelity, halal sustenance) that exhibit paradigmatic correspondence with empirically validated predictors in modern family psychology. The discussion argues that the conceptual synthesis of classical Sufi heritage and contemporary family studies provides a genuine theoretical contribution to global family scholarship, particularly relevant for post-Soviet Central Asian contexts. Theoretical implications include the development of a culturally embedded family well-being framework that transcends the limitations of secular individualistic models. Practical implications encompass applications in family counseling, premarital education programs, and parental responsibility training. The article concludes that classical Sufi axiology represents not merely an archaeological-historical resource but a vital epistemological framework for addressing contemporary family crises.

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary global family institution faces unprecedented axiological challenges. Empirical evidence from international demographic surveys reveals concerning trends: rising divorce rates exceeding 40% in OECD countries, declining marriage rates, increasing rates of non-marital births, and the destabilization of intergenerational bonds. These phenomena are not merely statistical aberrations but symptomatic manifestations of deeper axiological transformations associated with postmodern cultural fragmentation, the expansion of consumerist values, and the destabilizing effects of digital mediatization on intimate relationships.[1]

In response to these challenges, family scholarship has produced a substantial corpus of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, with particularly notable contributions from positive psychology, attachment theory, ecological systems theory and the triangular theory of love. However, these predominantly Western frameworks operate within secular-individualistic ontological assumptions that may not adequately capture the axiological depth required for sustainable family well-being, particularly in cultural contexts shaped by alternative metaphysical traditions.[2]

The classical Sufi tradition, developed across the Islamic civilization from the 8th to the 17th centuries, represents one of humanity's most sophisticated systems for understanding human relationships, ethical cultivation, and existential meaning-making. Major figures including Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), Bahauddin Naqshband (1318-1389), Ahmad Yasawi (1093-1166), and Makhdumi Azam Dahbedi (1461-1542) developed comprehensive teachings on family relations, marriage, and parental responsibility. Despite the recognized philosophical significance of these contributions, their potential as a methodological resource for contemporary family studies remains substantially underexplored in international scholarship.[3]

This research gap is particularly significant given the demonstrated cultural embeddedness of family well-being and the limitations of universalistic Western frameworks when applied to non-Western contexts. Recent calls for indigenous and culturally embedded approaches to family research provide additional justification for the systematic investigation of classical Sufi resources. The present study addresses this gap by conducting a phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis of classical Sufi axiology as a methodological resource for contemporary family studies.[4]

The research is guided by three primary questions: (1) What constitutes the conceptual architecture of classical Sufi axiology as applied to family relations? (2) How does this architecture relate paradigmatically to contemporary Western family theories? (3) What are the theoretical and practical implications of integrating classical Sufi axiology into contemporary family scholarship? These questions are addressed through a structured analytical procedure that combines hermeneutic textual interpretation, comparative-conceptual analysis, and integrative-synthetic mapping.[5]

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophical inquiry. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating axiological-conceptual phenomena that require deep interpretive engagement with primary textual sources rather than positivistic empirical measurement. The research design integrates three complementary analytical procedures: hermeneutic textual analysis, comparative-conceptual analysis, and integrative-synthetic mapping.[6]

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework draws on three intersecting traditions. First, phenomenological axiology as developed by Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann, which provides analytical tools for examining the ontological status, gnoseological structure, and

praxiological actualization of values. Second, philosophical hermeneutics, which informs the interpretive engagement with primary Sufi texts. Third, contemporary family systems theory and ecological models, which provide the comparative reference points for assessing the integrative potential of Sufi axiology.[7]

### 2.3. Data Sources

Primary sources comprised classical Sufi texts addressing family and marriage relations: al-Ghazali's "Ihya ulum al-din" (particularly the volumes on marriage and parental responsibility), Rumi's "Mathnawi-yi Ma'nawi" (selected passages on love and relational ontology), Ibn Arabi's "Fusus al-hikam" and "al-Futuhat al-makkiyya" (sections on marriage as ontological actualization), Naqshband's preserved teachings, Yasawi's "Diwan-i hikmat", Bakharzi's "Risala-yi wasaya", and Makhdumi Azam's "Asrar al-nikah". Secondary sources included contemporary scholarship on Sufism and authoritative works in family studies.[8]

### 2.4. Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure proceeded through four stages. Stage one involved hermeneutic close reading of primary Sufi texts to identify and extract the core axiological concepts pertaining to family and marriage relations. Stage two consisted of conceptual mapping of these concepts into a coherent architectural structure, identifying their interconnections and hierarchical relationships. Stage three implemented comparative-conceptual analysis between extracted Sufi concepts and corresponding constructs in contemporary family theories, identifying paradigmatic convergences and divergences. Stage four conducted integrative-synthetic mapping to develop a unified theoretical framework that incorporates both traditions while preserving their respective epistemological integrities. Throughout the analysis, methodological reflexivity was maintained through systematic peer debriefing and triangulation across multiple textual sources.[9]

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Conceptual Architecture of Classical Sufi Family Axiology

The hermeneutic analysis of primary Sufi texts revealed that classical Sufi axiology of family operates through three interconnected dimensions. The first dimension — the onto-metaphysical — addresses the fundamental ontological status of family and marriage as actualizations of cosmic-metaphysical principles. Ibn Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) frames marriage as a microcosmic actualization of macrocosmic dialectics, while Rumi's metaphysics of love (*ishq*) positions love as the fundamental motive force of cosmic dynamics.[10] The second dimension — the gnoseological-irfani — concerns family as an epistemic locus for the cultivation of intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifa*). Al-Ghazali's framework of family as a school for knowing the Divine through self-knowing and other-knowing, complemented by the Naqshbandi philosophy of *suhbat* (spiritual conversation), exemplifies this dimension. The third dimension — the ethopoetico-praxiological — articulates concrete ethical practices for daily family life, including patience (*sabr*), forgiveness, respect (*ihiram*), mercy (*rahma*), and fidelity.[11]

### 3.2. Identification of Seven Core Axiological Constants

Cross-textual analysis revealed seven core axiological constants that consistently appear across major Sufi sources: (1) love-as-ontological-foundation (*mahabba/ishq*), (2) patience-as-existential-stance (*sabr*), (3) forgiveness-as-relational-restoration (*afw*), (4) respect-as-recognition-of-divine-presence (*ihiram*), (5) mercy-as-active-compassion (*rahma*), (6) fidelity-as-existential-commitment (*wafa*), and (7) halal sustenance as material-spiritual integrity. These constants do not function as isolated ethical maxims but constitute an integrated axiological vertical with hierarchical organization. The transcendental-metaphysical level (corresponding to Divine pleasure and eschatological orientation) anchors the gnoseological-irfani level (knowledge and wisdom), which in turn anchors the ethopoetico-praxiological level (concrete daily practices).[12]

### 3.3. Paradigmatic Convergences with Contemporary Family Theories

Comparative-conceptual analysis identified significant paradigmatic convergences between Sufi axiology and contemporary family theories. The Sufi concept of patience (*sabr*) demonstrates substantial paradigmatic correspondence with the construct of resilience as developed in positive psychology [13]. Both frameworks position the capacity to constructively engage with adversity as a central axiological resource for sustainable functioning. The Naqshbandi philosophy of *subhat* (spiritual conversation) shows paradigmatic alignment with Buber's relational ontology of the I-Thou encounter and Levinas's ethics of the Other. The classical concept of family as an epistemic locus corresponds with Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of socially mediated cognition. Bakharzi's tetrachromatic theory of cultivation (good seed, good place, good fertilizer, favorable time) exhibits remarkable paradigmatic similarity with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.[14]

### 3.4. Distinctive Contributions Beyond Western Frameworks

While significant convergences were identified, the analysis also revealed three distinctive contributions of Sufi axiology that extend beyond contemporary Western frameworks. First, the explicit incorporation of a transcendental-metaphysical dimension that anchors immanent family practices in an axiological vertical, contrasting with the predominantly horizontal orientation of secular models. Second, the integration of material-economic ethics (halal sustenance doctrine) with relational and spiritual dimensions, addressing the socio-economic determinants of family well-being often neglected in psychological frameworks.[15] Third, the systematic articulation of intergenerational responsibility as a constitutive ontological feature rather than a contingent ethical norm, providing conceptual resources for addressing the contemporary fragmentation of intergenerational bonds.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings carry several significant theoretical implications for contemporary family scholarship. First, the identification of paradigmatic convergences between Sufi axiology and Western family theories supports the proposition that core insights about family well-being exhibit substantial cross-cultural validity, while the specific articulations vary across traditions. This finding aligns with universalist arguments in cross-cultural psychology while also affirming the cultural specificity emphasized in indigenous psychology approaches. Second, the documented distinctive contributions of Sufi axiology challenge the implicit hegemony of secular-individualistic frameworks in family scholarship and demonstrate the heuristic value of engaging with non-Western metaphysical traditions for theoretical enrichment.[16]

Third, the multidimensional architecture identified in classical Sufi axiology offers a methodological model for integrating ontological, epistemological, and ethical considerations in family research. Contemporary family studies often operate within disciplinary silos that artificially separate these dimensions, whereas the Sufi paradigm demonstrates the heuristic value of their integrated treatment. This insight has implications for methodological pluralism in family scholarship and supports interdisciplinary dialogues between sociology, psychology, philosophy, and religious studies. Fourth, the explicit articulation of an axiological vertical with hierarchical organization provides conceptual resources for addressing the value-relativism that characterizes much postmodern family discourse.[17]

### 4.2. Practical Implications

The practical implications of this research extend across several applied domains. In family counseling and therapy, the integration of axiological-spiritual dimensions alongside cognitive-behavioral and systemic approaches may enhance therapeutic efficacy in cultural contexts where these dimensions hold significant meaning. The work of

Pargament on spiritually integrated psychotherapy provides relevant precedent, and the present findings suggest that classical Sufi resources offer particularly rich material for such integration in Muslim-majority contexts. In premarital education programs, the seven core axiological constants identified in this study can structure curriculum content that addresses both psychological skills and spiritual-existential orientations toward marriage.[18]

In parental responsibility training, Bakharzi's tetrachromatic theory of cultivation (good seed, good place, good fertilizer, favorable time) offers a culturally embedded framework that complements Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory while incorporating culturally meaningful metaphors and ethical orientations. In policy contexts, the present findings support the development of family policies that explicitly incorporate cultural-spiritual heritage as a resource for family well-being, as exemplified in the Republic of Uzbekistan's 2021 Concept for Strengthening the Family Institution (Presidential Resolution PQ-5165). The integrative framework developed in this study provides a theoretical foundation for such policy initiatives.[19]

#### **4.3. Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The study's reliance on textual analysis precludes empirical validation of the identified axiological architecture in contemporary family functioning. Future research should employ mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative interviews with families embedded in Sufi traditions and quantitative measurement of relevant family well-being indicators. The selection of Sufi sources, while attempting representativeness, necessarily privileged figures with substantial textual legacies, potentially underrepresenting the diversity of Sufi traditions. Future research could extend the analysis to additional Sufi schools and regional traditions. Additionally, the comparative analysis was confined to predominantly Western family theories; future research should expand the comparative scope to include other non-Western frameworks such as Confucian family ethics and Hindu dharmic family teachings.[20]

### **5. Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that classical Sufi axiology constitutes a substantive methodological resource for contemporary family studies. Through phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis of primary Sufi sources and comparative-conceptual analysis with Western family theories, the investigation identified a three-dimensional axiological architecture (onto-metaphysical, gnoseological-irfani, ethopoetico-praxiological), seven core axiological constants, and distinctive contributions beyond predominantly secular frameworks. The findings support the integration of classical Sufi heritage into contemporary family scholarship, both for theoretical enrichment and practical applications in counseling, education, and policy development.

Beyond its specific findings, the study illustrates the broader heuristic value of engaging non-Western metaphysical traditions in contemporary social scientific scholarship. Classical Sufi axiology represents not merely an archaeological-historical curiosity but a vital epistemological framework for addressing contemporary family crises. The conceptual synthesis of classical Sufi heritage and modern family studies opens promising avenues for culturally embedded yet globally relevant approaches to family well-being. As family institutions worldwide navigate the challenges of postmodern cultural fragmentation, the integral wisdom developed within Sufi traditions offers epistemologically rich resources that merit serious engagement from international family scholarship.

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