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Reconstructing the Concept of Zuhd in Early Islamic Generations as a Response to the Contemporary Moral Crisis

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Abstract

This article examines the reconstruction of the concept of Zuhd (asceticism) as a model of transformative social ethics in responding to the moral crisis of modern society. The rapid development of modernity, marked by globalization, technological advancement, and consumerist culture, has contributed to the rise of materialism, hedonism, and the weakening of spiritual awareness. This study aims to reinterpret Zuhd from the perspective of early Islamic generations and to contextualize its relevance in contemporary life. Employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design through library research, data were collected from classical Sufi texts, the Qur'an, Hadith, and relevant contemporary studies, and were analysed using content analysis techniques. The findings reveal that Zuhd is not a rejection of worldly life but rather a balanced spiritual attitude that places material aspects proportionally within ethical and spiritual frameworks. The reconstruction results in four main dimensions: amaliyah (spiritual practice), Khauf (ethical awareness), moral (ethical conduct), and social critique. These dimension function integratively as a transformative ethical model capable of addressing modern moral challenges, suggesting that Zuhd can serve as a relevant ethical framework for fostering a balanced, responsible, and spiritually grounded society in the contemporary era.

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Introduction

The development of modernity, marked by technological advancement, economic globalization, and rapid social transformation, has brought significant changes to human lifestyles. On the one hand, modernization provides convenience in various aspects of life; on the other hand, it also gives rise to a range of moral problems such as increasing materialism, hedonism, individualism, and consumerism (Fadlillah & Wasil, 2025). This phenomenon is not only evident in global societies but is also experienced by Muslims living within the current of modernity. The growth of digital technology and consumption-based economies often encourages individuals to regard material success as the primary indicator of happiness, thereby marginalizing spiritual dimensions and religious ethics. In contemporary society, this condition is reflected in the growing orientation toward instant gratification and the weakening of individual spiritual control (Rofiq, 2024).

On the other hand, within certain segments of society, the concept of Islamic asceticism is often misunderstood. Many people assume that it entails abandoning all worldly matters without properly distinguishing between aspects of worldly life that are blameworthy and those that are permissible in Islam (Setiyawan & Khotimah, 2022). This misunderstanding has even led to the belief that salvation in the hereafter can only be attained by completely renouncing worldly life, including withdrawing to isolated places for worship. In this view, a person is considered closer to God when they detach themselves from social activities, family life, and even socio-religious obligations such as congregational and Friday prayers. Such perceptions indicate a reduction of this concept to an extreme form of asceticism that is inconsistent with the principle of balance emphasized in Islam (Rangkuti & Hidayat, 2026). This condition is likely caused by a lack of understanding of how this concept was practiced and understood by the early generations of Muslims.

One of the key concepts in Islamic spiritual tradition that holds significant potential to address the challenges of modern life is Islamic asceticism. In the perspective of Sufism, it is not understood as a total renunciation of the world, but rather as an inner attitude that does not regard worldly life as the ultimate goal (Anwar, 2010). This concept did not lead early Muslim generations to withdraw from social life; on the contrary, it provided them with spiritual strength that enabled them to actively engage with the dynamics of society (Al-Taftazani, 1985). In the contemporary context, various studies indicate that its values remain highly relevant in responding to the consumerist and materialistic culture of modern society (Mulyani et al., 2025). It can be understood as a form of spiritual awareness that encourages individuals to control their desires, manage their needs wisely, and prioritize moral and spiritual values over material interests (Defriono et al., 2023). In some modern discourses, it is even associated with minimalist lifestyles as a response to consumerism. Unlike previous studies that tend to position it as an individual ascetic practice, this research proposes a reconstruction of this concept as practiced by the early generations of Islam as a model of transformative social ethics, functioning not only as spiritual control but also as a critique of moral tendencies such as materialism and moral degradation in modern society. Based on this background, this study aims to examine the concept and understanding of Islamic asceticism in the tradition of the early Muslim generations, identify the characteristics of its practice during that period, and analyze the relevance of its values as a moral solution to contemporary challenges faced by Muslims.

The main argument underlying this article is that Islamic asceticism has great potential as a paradigm of spiritual ethics capable of addressing moral crises in modern life. It does not imply rejecting the world, but rather positioning it proportionally within a framework of spiritual and moral values (Hosen et al., 2025). In the context of modern life, which is heavily influenced by materialism and consumerism, its values can serve as an alternative lifestyle that balances worldly needs with human spiritual goals (Putra et al., 2024). Therefore, the internalization of this concept is believed to offer an effective moral solution to the problems of materialism, consumerism, and the spiritual crisis faced by Muslims in the modern era.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical library research design. This approach is chosen because the study aims to examine in depth the concept of *Zuhd* in the Islamic tradition and to reconstruct it as a model of transformative social ethics in responding to the moral crisis of modern society. The object of this study is the concept of *Zuhd* as understood in classical and contemporary Sufi literature. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data include major works in the Sufi tradition that discuss the concept of *Zuhd*, both from classical texts and contemporary studies. Meanwhile, secondary data consist of scholarly journal articles, academic books, and previous research related to spiritual ethics, moral crises, and the dynamics of modern life.

Data collection was carried out through documentation techniques by identifying, inventorying, and critically examining various written sources relevant to the focus of the study. To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing various references with related themes. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques combined with a thematic analysis approach. The analytical process involves several stages: (1) data reduction through the selection and filtering of relevant information, (2) thematic categorization by grouping key concepts related to *Zuhd*, (3) interpretation to understand the ethical and spiritual dimensions embedded in the concept, and (4) conceptual synthesis to reconstruct *Zuhd* as a model of transformative social ethics (Krippendorff, 2019). This synthesis stage is a crucial part of the study as it produces an analytical framework consisting of four main dimensions: practical (*amaliyah*), fear (*Khauf*), moral, and social critique. Thus, this methodological approach is systematically employed to support the research objective of formulating a contextualized concept of *Zuhd* that is relevant to the challenges of modern life

Results

The Meaning of Zuhd from the Perspective of the Early Islamic Generations

The term *Zuhd* is derived from the Arabic root زَهَدَ – يَزْهَدُ – زُهْدًا, which means to renounce, to be uninterested in, or to turn away from something considered insignificant. A hadith related to this concept was narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who said: “*Zuhd* towards the world is not by prohibiting what is lawful or by wasting wealth, but rather it is to have greater trust in what is in the hand of Allah than in what is in your own hand, and to prefer the reward of a calamity when it befalls you more than if it had not occurred” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 2262). This hadith indicates that *Zuhd* in Islam

does not imply a total rejection of worldly life or extreme asceticism. Instead, it refers to a mental and spiritual attitude that prioritizes the values of the hereafter over worldly interests without negating or prohibiting lawful worldly enjoyment (Alifya et al., 2025).

Terminologically, *Zuhd* refers to an attitude of detachment from worldly matters. A person who practices *Zuhd* is referred to as a *zāhid*, *zuhhād*, or *zāhidūn* (Hafiun, 2017). Within the framework of Sufism, *Zuhd* is understood as one of the spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) that leads an individual toward *ma'rifah* (gnosis) of God. However, *Zuhd* is not limited to the spiritual dimension; it also functions as a practical ethical framework that shapes a Muslim's worldview and behavior in responding to life's realities. In this regard, *Zuhd* encompasses two interrelated dimensions: a transcendental dimension oriented toward one's relationship with God and an ethical dimension that regulates human interaction with the world and others (A. Syukur, 2004).

This understanding can be observed in the lives of the early generations of Islam, particularly the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his companions. The Prophet said:

“Be detached from the world, and Allah will love you; and be detached from what people possess, and people will love you” (Sunan Ibn Mājah, no. 4102).

According to 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī, as cited in Fahmi (2016) this hadith encourages individuals to accumulate wealth only as necessary, similar to a traveler who uses provisions for the sake of Allah. It also emphasizes the importance of *qanā'ah* (contentment), whereby wealth remains in one's hands rather than in one's heart.

This hadith not only reflects the spiritual dimension of *Zuhd* but also highlights its social implications, namely the creation of harmonious relationships between individuals and God, as well as among fellow human beings. In this context, *Zuhd* functions as an ethical mechanism that prevents excessive attachment to material possessions and to what others own.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ illustrated the insignificance of the world compared to the hereafter by likening it to a person dipping a finger into the ocean; the water that clings to the finger represents the world, while the ocean represents the hereafter (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). This analogy fosters ethical awareness that human life should be oriented toward eternal values. In other words, *Zuhd* embodies an existential awareness that positions the world as a means rather than an ultimate end.

Similar perspectives were expressed by the companions. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, in a letter to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, stated:

“Indeed, you will not attain any deed of the hereafter more virtuous than Zuhd towards the world. Therefore, beware of lowly character and greed.”(Abu Bakar Ahmad bin Marwan al-Dainuri, n.d.)

This statement emphasizes that *Zuhd* is closely related to the ability to restrain excessive love for worldly matters, as such attachment may lead to greed and moral degradation.

Likewise, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib stated:

“Indeed, this world has departed, and the hereafter is approaching. Each has its followers, so be among the followers of the hereafter and not of the world. Today is a time for action without reckoning, while tomorrow is a time for reckoning without action.” (Ibnu Abi Syaibah al-Absi al-Kufi, n.d.)

This statement reinforces the notion that worldly life is temporary, while the hereafter is the ultimate destination. Thus, *Zuhd* encourages individuals to utilize worldly life as a means for righteous action in preparation for the hereafter.

The foregoing expressions indicate that *Zuhd* does not imply a total renunciation of worldly life, as is commonly misunderstood by some, but rather entails positioning the world proportionally without making it the ultimate goal of existence. In this sense, the world is viewed as a means for performing righteous deeds and preparing for the eternal life of the Hereafter. Thus, *Zuhd* may be reinforced as an inner disposition that enables individuals to maintain a balance between worldly engagement and spiritual orientation toward the Hereafter (Harahap, 2025).

In contemporary discourse, the concept of *Zuhd* is also understood as a form of self-discipline that functions to regulate human materialistic impulses (Ismailovna, 2022). This perspective underscores its cross-temporal relevance, not merely as a classical spiritual practice but as an ethical principle capable of addressing modern challenges such as consumerism and hedonism. In this regard, *Zuhd* can be positioned as a transformative ethic-spiritual concept, as it not only governs the relationship between humans and God but also shapes a more balanced mode of human engagement with the material world.

In line with this, the Qur’an affirms that worldly life is transient and should not become an object of excessive attachment. From this perspective, *Zuhd* is understood as a principle of moderation that safeguards individuals from two extremes: excessive materialism and asceticism that negates worldly life altogether (Muqit, 2020). This synthesis demonstrates that *Zuhd* in Islam represents a form of balance ethics, wherein the world is regarded as a means rather than an end. Accordingly, *Zuhd* may be defined as a spiritual attitude that reduces attachment to worldly matters, strengthens orientation toward the Hereafter, and frames worldly life as a responsible and balanced arena for righteous action. Such an attitude encourages simplicity, sustained productivity, and inner moderation, rather than an extreme withdrawal from worldly affairs.

Based on this analysis, it is argued that the concept of *Zuhd* among the early generations of Islam cannot be reduced to an individual spiritual practice alone; rather, it constitutes an ethical construct encompassing two principal dimensions: the transcendental and the social. These dimensions provide a foundation for formulating a model of social ethics that not only emphasizes individual spiritual development but also regulates social behavior in response to materialistic tendencies. This model foregrounds the balance between orientation toward the Hereafter and worldly responsibility as a central principle in the life of a Muslim.

Characteristics of Zuhd in the Early Islamic Generations

In its early development, *Zuhd* can be understood as the embryonic form of Sufism before it evolved into a systematic intellectual discipline. During the first and second centuries of Hijri, *Zuhd* had not yet been formulated as a well-established theoretical framework; rather, it is more accurately understood as a practical and contextual phase of

asceticism. In this period, *Zuhd* developed as a response to the dynamic conditions of Muslim life, encompassing spiritual, moral, and socio-political dimensions.

Based on an analysis of the practices and interpretations of *Zuhd* during this period, it can be identified that *Zuhd* was not merely an individual spiritual phenomenon but possessed a set of characteristics that formed a pattern of social ethics. In this study, these characteristics are reconstructed into four principal dimensions: the *amaliyah* dimension (spiritual practice), the *Khauf* dimension (eschatological awareness), the moral dimension (ethical formation), and the dimension of social critique (response to socio-political conditions).

1. The *Amaliyah* Dimension: *Zuhd* as Spiritual Practice

In the early phase of Islam, *Zuhd* was more prominently expressed in practice (*amaliyah*) than in theoretical formulation. This was reflected in a simple spiritual lifestyle, such as intensifying acts of worship, reducing consumption, and limiting worldly needs (Nasirudin, 2009). The spiritual life of this period aimed to realize both worldly and eternal happiness, as some of the Prophet's Companions did not prioritize the Hereafter over the world, nor the world over the Hereafter.

The phenomenon of Ahl al-Suffah represents a concrete manifestation of this dimension. They lived modestly in the environment of the Prophet's Mosque and centered their lives around spiritual devotion (Anwar, 2010). However, such practices cannot be entirely separated from socio-economic contexts. As noted by Abdul Hakim Hassan, the ascetic lifestyle in early Islam was also influenced by conditions of economic limitation, indicating that spiritual and social factors were intertwined in shaping the practice of *Zuhd* (Nasirudin, 2009). This demonstrates that the *amaliyah* dimension of *Zuhd* is not ahistorical but emerges from the interaction between religious values and social realities.

2. The *Khauf* Dimension: Eschatological Awareness as a Spiritual Foundation

The second characteristic of *Zuhd* in this period is the strong presence of the *Khauf* dimension, namely fear of God rooted in an awareness of the Hereafter. The Companions and the *tabi'in* viewed worldly life as temporary, directing their orientation toward salvation in the Hereafter (Syarif Mubarak et al., 2025). This eschatological awareness encouraged practices such as self-accountability (*muhasabah*), self-restraint, and avoidance of excessive worldly pleasures.

Figures such as Hasan al-Basri represent this mode of spirituality. However, the dominance of *Khauf* may also be understood as a form of religiosity oriented primarily toward individual salvation. In this sense, *Zuhd* in its early phase emphasized inward-looking personal dimensions rather than broader social transformation. Nevertheless, the *Khauf* dimension remained a crucial foundation for shaping moral consciousness, which in turn influenced individual social behaviour.

3. The Moral Dimension: *Zuhd* as a Mechanism for Ethical Formation

During the first and second centuries of Hijri, *Zuhd* also functioned as a mechanism for improving individual and societal morality (Yusniani, 2015). This period witnessed political conflicts, struggles for power, and various forms of social deviation within the Muslim community (Muthohar, 2015). Such conditions prompted scholars and pious figures to emphasize the importance of piety as a means of restoring the community's orientation toward Islamic values.

In this context, *Zuhd* was not merely understood as withdrawal from the world but as an effort to build moral integrity (Hosen et al., 2025). Simplicity, honesty, self-control, and detachment from wealth became core values cultivated through the practice of *Zuhd* (Hosen et al., 2025). Thus, the moral dimension of *Zuhd* serves as an ethical mechanism that guides individuals to avoid deviant behavior and to foster a more just social order.

4. The Dimension of Social Critique: *Zuhd* as a Response to Socio-Political Reality

Beyond its spiritual and moral dimensions, *Zuhd* in this period also contained elements of social critique directed at prevailing societal and political conditions. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Islamic political system underwent significant transformation, from the relatively egalitarian era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs to the more power-oriented Umayyad dynasty (F. Syukur, 2009). This shift gave rise to increasing tendencies toward materialism and political domination within society.

In this context, the practice of *Zuhd* developed as a moral response to socio-political realities perceived as deviating from Islamic values. The *zuhhad* (ascetics) did not directly engage in political conflicts; rather, they expressed critique through their simple lifestyle and their calls to return to spiritual values. Thus, *Zuhd* functioned as a symbolic form of social critique, as well as an effort to preserve moral integrity amid the dynamics of power.

Based on these four dimensions, it can be affirmed that *Zuhd* in the first and second centuries of Hijri was not merely an individual spiritual practice but had formed a multidimensional framework of social ethics. The *amaliyah* dimension reflects its basis in spiritual practice, the *Khauf* dimension strengthens eschatological awareness, the moral dimension serves as a mechanism for ethical formation, and the dimension of social critique highlights its role as a response to socio-political realities. Accordingly, *Zuhd* can be reconstructed as a model of social ethics that is not only reflective but also transformative in shaping the orientation of both individuals and society. This model provides an important foundation for understanding the relevance of *Zuhd* in addressing moral crises in the context of modern life.

The Reconstruction of Zuhd as a Transformative Model of Social Ethics in Responding to the Modern Moral Crisis

The development of modern life, marked by technological advancement, globalization, and economic dynamism, has brought significant transformations to patterns of human living. On the one hand, modernity provides convenience across various aspects of life; on the other hand, it also generates a range of moral problems, including materialism, hedonism, consumerism, and the weakening of spiritual awareness (Putri, 2025). In this context, many individuals tend to measure success solely in terms of material achievement and social status, thereby marginalizing ethical and spiritual values (Hosen et al., 2025). This condition indicates that modernity is not necessarily accompanied by moral maturity. Therefore, a spiritual approach is required to balance material progress with the depth of moral and spiritual values (Udin et al., 2025).

Within this framework, the concept of *Zuhd* as practiced by the early generations of Islam can no longer be sufficiently understood as an individual ascetic attitude; rather, it

needs to be reconstructed as a transformative model of social ethics. This reconstruction involves shifting the meaning of *Zuhd* from merely a spiritual practice to an ethical system encompassing practical action, consciousness, morality, and social critique. Accordingly, *Zuhd* is no longer passive (i.e., withdrawing from the world), but becomes active in shaping life orientation and the structure of human social relations. This reconstruction is grounded in four principal dimensions identified in the practice of *Zuhd* among the early Islamic generations, which are then re-actualized in the context of modern life as follows:

1. Reconstruction of the *Amaliyah* Dimension: From Consumptive Patterns to Spiritual Discipline

In modern society, consumerist lifestyles have not only become habitual but have also shaped individual social identity, where material possession is often regarded as an indicator of success and social recognition. Individuals are no longer merely fulfilling needs but are driven to satisfy ever-expanding desires without limit. In this context, the *amaliyah* dimension of *Zuhd* is reconstructed as a mechanism for transforming consumption-oriented behaviour into reflective spiritual discipline. Practices such as simplicity, regulation of needs, and limitation of consumption are not understood as rejection of the world, but as ethical strategies for managing life proportionally (Nasirudin, 2009; Pahlevi, 2022). Thus, *Zuhd* functions to cultivate the awareness that the value of life is not determined by material accumulation, but by the quality of spiritual and moral relationships.

Furthermore, this dimension operates at the practical level by shaping value-conscious and meaning-oriented lifestyles. Individuals who internalize the values of *Zuhd* are able to control consumptive desires and avoid being trapped in exploitative capitalist logic. In this regard, *Zuhd* not only fosters personal piety but also carries socio-economic implications, such as promoting more just and sustainable patterns of consumption. This aligns with findings that self-discipline in Islamic spiritual traditions functions as an ethical mechanism in responding to modern materialistic tendencies. Therefore, the reconstruction of the *amaliyah* dimension demonstrates that *Zuhd* can serve as a practical critique of modern consumer culture, as well as an ethical alternative for cultivating a more balanced, simple, and meaningful way of life.

2. Reconstruction of the *Khauf* Dimension: Strengthening Ethical Awareness as Internal Control

Among the early generations of Islam, *Khauf* functioned as an eschatological awareness that situated human beings in a vertical relationship with God, thereby encouraging individuals to avoid deviant behaviour. Awareness of accountability in the Hereafter served as the primary foundation for shaping both inner disposition and outward conduct. In the modern context, this dimension is reconstructed into ethical awareness that functions as an internal control over human actions. The recognition that every action carries moral consequences, both spiritual and social, becomes the basis for the formation of individual integrity (Syarif Mubarak et al., 2025). Thus, *Khauf* is no longer understood as a passive fear, but as a reflective awareness that guides individuals in making moral decisions.

This reconstruction is particularly relevant in modern societies characterized by the weakening of external controls and the rise of value relativism. In situations where social norms are often inconsistent and legal enforcement is not always effective, the

Khauf dimension functions as an autonomous mechanism of self-regulation. Individuals possessing such awareness act ethically not due to fear of social sanctions, but because of an internal moral drive. This perspective aligns with the view that spiritual consciousness in Islam serves as an effective internal control in shaping ethical behaviour (Hosen et al., 2025). Therefore, the *Khauf* dimension plays a strategic role in building integrity-based character and serves as a foundation for the formation of a society that is not only legally orderly but also morally robust.

3. Reconstruction of the Moral Dimension: From Individual Piety to Social Ethics

In the early Islamic generations, *Zuhd* functioned as a means of moral formation oriented toward individual piety. Values such as simplicity, honesty, and self-restraint were integral to the development of a Muslim's character. However, in the modern context, this dimension is reconstructed into a foundation of social ethics with broader societal implications. The awareness that wealth, position, and power are merely trusts (*amanah*) encourages individuals to act justly and responsibly (Satria & Qomaruzzaman, 2023). Thus, *Zuhd* not only shapes the relationship between individuals and God but also directs more ethical and just social relations.

Moreover, this reconstruction demonstrates that *Zuhd* can function as a transformative mechanism from individual piety toward collective social ethics. In the context of moral crises such as corruption, manipulation, and abuse of power, the values of *Zuhd* serve as ethical controls that prevent deviant behavior. Individuals who embody *Zuhd* do not view power as a means of exploitation but as a trust to be accounted for. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that the internalization of spiritual values significantly contributes to the formation of social integrity and ethical conduct (Hariyadi et al., 2022). Therefore, this dimension plays a crucial role in building a culture of integrity within society, where moral values are not merely normative discourse but are internalized in everyday practice.

4. Reconstruction of the Social Critique Dimension: *Zuhd* as Critical Awareness of Materialism

Modernity not only produces progress but also constructs social structures dominated by materialistic values, competition, and image-making. Individuals are often driven to project idealized self-images through material ownership and lifestyle displays in public spaces, particularly through digital media. Phenomena such as ostentation (showing off), the pursuit of popularity, and competition for social status illustrate how materialistic values shape social consciousness (Maliki et al., 2024). In this context, the social critique dimension of *Zuhd* is reconstructed as a form of critical awareness toward such value constructions.

Within this dimension, *Zuhd* does not merely function as a personal withdrawal from worldly life, but as an ethical form of resistance against the dominance of materialistic culture. The practice of simple living and detachment from material symbols becomes an implicit yet powerful form of social critique. This is supported by studies indicating that Sufi values hold potential as a critique of materially oriented modernity (Muqit, 2020). Thus, *Zuhd* fosters reflective awareness within society, preventing individuals from being trapped in illusory values shaped by modern culture. Consequently, this dimension positions *Zuhd* as an ethical force that not only shapes

individuals but also has the potential to transform collective perspectives on the meaning of life.

In addition, the normative foundation of this concept is reinforced by the Qur'an, particularly Q.S. Al-Hadid (57): 20, which emphasizes the transient and illusory nature of worldly life. This verse provides a theological framework suggesting that excessive attachment to the world constitutes a primary source of moral deviation. This perspective is consistent with the findings of Muhtadin (2020) who argues that excessive love of worldly matters leads to spiritual dryness and moral degradation. Empirically, phenomena of modern moral crises, such as the rise of individualism and materialism, have also been confirmed in various studies (Jariyah & Mujab, 2025). This further affirms that spiritual approaches such as *Zuhd* are not only normatively relevant but also empirically grounded in addressing contemporary problems.

Based on the overall analysis, it can be affirmed that *Zuhd* is not merely a classical spiritual concept, but rather a transformative model of social ethics with a multidimensional structure and a clear operational mechanism. The four dimensions of *Zuhd* are not independent; rather, they are interconnected in forming a comprehensive ethical system: the *amaliyah* dimension shapes practice, the *Khauf* dimension builds awareness, the moral dimension directs behavior, and the social critique dimension fosters collective reflection.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the concept of *Zuhd* among the early generations of Islam cannot merely be understood as an individual ascetic practice that rejects worldly life, but rather as a transformative model of social ethics that possesses strong relevance in responding to the modern moral crisis. The study reveals that *Zuhd* in the early Islamic period was constructed upon four principal dimensions, namely the *amaliyah* dimension (spiritual practice), *Khauf* (eschatological awareness), moral (ethical formation), and social critique. These four dimensions are integrative interconnected in forming an ethical system that is not only oriented toward the relationship between humans and God, but also regulates the relationship between humans, the world, and social life. In the contemporary context, the reconstruction of *Zuhd* produces an ethical paradigm that positions worldly life proportionally, thereby preventing individuals from being trapped in materialism, hedonism, and consumerist culture that characterize modern society. Thus, *Zuhd* is no longer understood as a passive withdrawal from worldly affairs, but rather as an active spiritual consciousness that shapes ethical behavior and social responsibility.

The findings of this study share both similarities and differences with previous studies. The similarities can be observed in findings showing that Islamic spiritual values remain relevant in addressing modern moral crises and materialism (Defriono et al., 2023; Muqit, 2020; Putra et al., 2024). Previous studies have also emphasized that *Zuhd* functions as a form of self-control over materialistic and consumptive impulses (Ismailovna, 2022; Mulyani et al., 2025). Furthermore, the study conducted by Hosen et al. (2025) demonstrates that spiritual awareness serves as a moral control mechanism within modern social life. However, this study provides a more specific contribution through the reconstruction of *Zuhd* as a transformative model of social ethics structured multidimensionally through four main dimensions: *amaliyah*, *Khauf*, moral, and social

critique. Previous studies tended to position *Zuhd* as an individual spiritual practice, whereas this study demonstrates that *Zuhd* also possesses social and structural functions in shaping collective social consciousness toward modern moral problems. Therefore, this study expands the understanding of *Zuhd* from merely an individual Sufi concept into a more contextual paradigm of social ethics.

The findings of this study reflect that the modern moral crisis is not solely caused by technological advancement and globalization, but is also influenced by the loss of spiritual orientation in human life. As argued by Al-Taftazani (1985), the primary problem of modern society is not merely material poverty, but rather spiritual emptiness that causes human beings to lose the meaning of life. The results of this study demonstrate that when individuals perceive the world as the ultimate goal of life, tendencies toward materialism, individualism, and excessive consumerism emerge. Conversely, when the values of *Zuhd* are internalized as spiritual consciousness and social ethics, individuals become capable of proportionally controlling material desires and constructing a more meaningful life orientation. This finding also strengthens the perspectives of Nasirudin (2009) and A. Syukur (2004), who argue that *Zuhd* does not imply rejection of the world, but rather functions as a mechanism of self-control that maintains balance between material and spiritual needs. Thus, these findings indicate that modern moral problems are fundamentally related to the crisis of human life orientation.

The implications of this study indicate that the reconstruction of *Zuhd* may serve as an ethical-spiritual approach in building a society that is more balanced, responsible, and integrity-oriented. In the context of modern life dominated by consumerist culture and material competition, the values of *Zuhd* can function as mechanisms of moral and social control. This is in line with the findings of Hariyadi et al (2022), which emphasize that the internalization of spiritual values contributes significantly to the formation of social integrity and ethical behaviour. Moreover, the study conducted by Jariyah and Mujab (2025) demonstrates that the increasing tendencies of modern individualism and materialism require transformative spiritual approaches. Therefore, the values of *Zuhd* need to be integrated into education, character development, and social life as efforts to cultivate collective moral consciousness. These implications further indicate that Islamic educational institutions should not merely emphasize cognitive dimensions, but also develop students' spiritual and social ethical dimensions.

Theoretically, the effectiveness of *Zuhd* as a transformative model of social ethics can be explained through the relationship between spiritual consciousness and the formation of social behaviour. Within the perspective of Sufism, *Zuhd* constitutes a spiritual *maqām* that develops self-control, simplicity, and orientation toward the Hereafter (2010). Such consciousness generates an internal control mechanism that encourages individuals to behave ethically without relying entirely on external supervision. This perspective is consistent with Hosen et al. (2025), who argue that spiritual consciousness plays a significant role in building moral integrity within modern society. In addition, the concept of *Khauf* within *Zuhd* functions as an eschatological awareness that strengthens human moral responsibility for every action undertaken. Meanwhile, the social critique dimension of *Zuhd* demonstrates that Islamic spirituality is not passive in nature, but rather possesses the potential to critique materialistic and exploitative social structures (Muqit, 2020). Therefore, the effectiveness of *Zuhd* in responding to the modern moral crisis

cannot be separated from its ability to simultaneously integrate spiritual, moral, and social dimensions.

Based on the findings of this study, future efforts should focus on developing a more contextual actualization of the values of *Zuhd* within modern life. Islamic education needs to integrate the values of *Zuhd* not merely as normative Sufi teachings, but also as a social ethical approach relevant to the challenges of modernity. Furthermore, the promotion of simple living, consumption control, and the development of spiritually based moral awareness should be encouraged within various social spheres. Future studies are also expected to examine the implementation of *Zuhd* values in contemporary contexts, such as digital education, social media culture, modern economics, and youth character development. Thus, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for developing a more adaptive, transformative, and contextually relevant paradigm of Islamic ethics in addressing the moral problems of modern society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Zuhd* in the perspective of the early Islamic generations cannot merely be understood as an individual ascetic practice that rejects worldly life, but rather as a transformative model of social ethics that remains highly relevant in responding to the modern moral crisis. The findings demonstrate that *Zuhd* among the early Muslim generations was constructed through four interconnected dimensions, namely the *amaliyah* dimension (spiritual practice), *Khauf* (eschatological awareness), moral (ethical formation), and social critique. These dimensions collectively form a comprehensive ethical framework that regulates not only the relationship between humans and God but also human interaction with society and the material world. In the context of modernity, characterized by materialism, consumerism, hedonism, and weakening spiritual awareness, the reconstruction of *Zuhd* offers an alternative ethical paradigm that balances worldly engagement with spiritual and moral responsibility. Thus, *Zuhd* may be positioned not as passive withdrawal from social life, but as an active ethical-spiritual orientation capable of shaping responsible, balanced, and integrity-based human behaviour.

The findings of this study also contribute to the development of scientific knowledge by expanding the understanding of *Zuhd* from a purely individual spiritual concept into a multidimensional framework of transformative social ethics. Previous studies have generally focused on *Zuhd* as an aspect of personal piety and ascetic spirituality, whereas this study demonstrates that *Zuhd* also contains social, moral, and critical dimensions that are relevant to contemporary social realities. In this regard, the study offers a conceptual reconstruction that contextualizes classical Islamic spirituality within the challenges of modern life. Consequently, this research contributes to the broader discourse of Islamic ethics by emphasizing that spiritual values are not detached from social realities, but instead function as ethical mechanisms for responding to moral degradation in contemporary society.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the research is based primarily on library research and textual analysis, focusing on classical Islamic sources and contemporary literature without involving empirical field data. As a result, the study is limited to conceptual and theoretical reconstruction rather than practical implementation in specific social contexts. Second, the analysis mainly emphasizes the perspective of

early Islamic generations and selected Sufi traditions, which may not fully represent the diversity of interpretations of *Zuhd* across different Islamic intellectual traditions. Third, the study does not specifically examine the practical application of *Zuhd* values within contemporary institutions such as education, economics, digital culture, or social policy. Therefore, the findings of this research should be understood within the scope of conceptual ethical reconstruction rather than as universally generalized conclusions applicable to all contexts.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research is recommended to examine the practical implementation of *Zuhd* values in various contemporary contexts, such as Islamic education, digital culture, social media behaviour, modern economic practices, and youth character development, in order to evaluate how *Zuhd* functions as an ethical-spiritual framework in responding to modern moral challenges. Further studies may also explore the relationship between *Zuhd* and contemporary issues such as sustainable lifestyles, environmental ethics, mental health, and digital consumerism to broaden its contextual relevance within modern society. In addition, empirical and interdisciplinary approaches are needed to strengthen the conceptual findings of this study and to enrich the discourse on *Zuhd* as a transformative model of social ethics that contributes to the development of a balanced, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible society.

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