



## The mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work and professional quality of life \*

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics, subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life of counselors. Conducted in a relational survey model, the study involved 333 counselors. Research data were collected with the "Effective Counselor Characteristics Assessment", "Psychological Capital", "Professional Quality of Life" and "Utrecht Work Engagement" scales. The PROCESS Macro regression-based bootstrapping technique was used to analyze the mediation models created for the purpose of the study. The analysis revealed that all direct and indirect effects were significant. The findings related to direct effects show that effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital significantly predict subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life (compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue). When examining the indirect effects, it was found that psychological capital partially mediates the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) as well as compassion satisfaction. Psychological capital fully mediates the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and burnout and compassion fatigue. The findings reveal the importance of not only effective counselor characteristics but also psychological capital in professional quality of life and subjective well-being at work (work engagement).

### Keywords

Effective counselor characteristics  
Psychological capital  
Professional quality of life  
Subjective well-being at work  
Work engagement

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### Introduction

With the reflections of positive psychology on business life, the perspective has emerged that eliminating dysfunctional conditions in working life will not lead to positive outcomes such as increased performance and commitment to work (Caza & Caza, 2008). In this direction, it has become important

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to investigate the factors that that can foster positive outcomes such as an increase in the performance and capacity of employees (Luthans, 2002). This emphasis on positive concepts in working life has led to a rapid increase in studies on subjective well-being at work (work engagement) (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012) and professional quality of life (Laverdière et al., 2019; Lawson & Myers, 2011; Stamm, 2010). This trend is a natural consequence of the positive reflections of subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life at both individual and organisational levels (Ekşi et al., 2017; Şantaş et al., 2018; Tanrıverdi & Sarıhan, 2013; Yeşiltaş et al., 2019).

Subjective well-being at work (work engagement) is defined as a positive and satisfying mood related to work, characterised by a person's dedication, absorption, vigor (Schaufeli et al., 2006). In this context, subjective well-being at work (work engagement) serves as an indicator of positive cognitive and emotional evaluations reflecting the relationship of employees with their jobs (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012). Similar to subjective well-being at work (work engagement), professional quality of life reflects professionals' cognitive and emotional evaluations of their work life, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. It is shaped by the dynamic interaction of these evaluations (Stamm, 2010). Compassion satisfaction, one of the core elements of this interaction, reflects the positive (Stamm, 2010). Compassion satisfaction, which is one of the basic building blocks of this interaction, reflects the positive aspect of evaluations of work life, while compassion fatigue and burnout reflect the negative aspect, and the interaction of these factors results in the general picture of professional quality of life (Larsen & Stamm, 2008). Therefore, professional quality of life reflects the balance between negative situations—such as difficulties, pressures, and problems encountered in professional life—and positive experiences, including satisfaction, success, and personal development at work.. These evaluations of work life not only contribute positively to the individual well-being of professionals (Patel, 2018; Tanrıverdi & Sarıhan, 2013), but also contribute to individual and organisational success by increasing work productivity (Ekşi et al., 2017; Şantaş et al., 2018; Yeşiltaş et al., 2019). These contributions indicate the place of both concepts in industrial and organisational psychology in recent years and their importance for employees.

Although subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life have an important place for all employees, it gains a more special dimension for mental health professionals and helpers (Mamacı, 2021; Morse et al., 2012). Mental health professionals—such as psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, and psychological counselors—are exposed to high levels of secondary traumatic experiences due to the nature of their work (Figley, 2002). As a matter of fact, there is evidence in studies on mental health professionals that professionals are at risk for emotional strain, burnout and secondary trauma stress (Ben-Zur & Michael, 2007; Zara & İçöz, 2015). These risks can be considered as factors that negatively affect subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life. Sharifian (2019) points out that these difficulties faced by mental health workers increase risk factors that negatively affect professional quality of life such as compassion fatigue and burnout in helpers. Psychological counselors, who are an important part of mental health services, can be considered as one of the professional groups that frequently face these challenges and risks (Skovholt, 2012). One of the main reasons for this evaluation is that counselors interact directly with pain, sorrow and traumatic life events due to the nature of their profession (Figley, 2002). Another reason is that the counseling process is not only based on a mutual therapeutic relationship between the help provider and the help recipient, but can also be likened to a mother-child relationship that provides unilateral care (Skovholt, 2012). This situation may cause counselors to have difficulty in maintaining the balance between helping others and allocating time for their own needs (Yerin Güneri et al., 2017). However, counselors can experience compassion satisfaction in line with both their helping role and the meaning of their work and can develop together with their clients in the process (Linley & Joseph, 2007). These positive and negative experiences of counselors regarding their professional life can have an impact on both their subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and their professional quality of life, which is characterised by compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Arslan, 2018; Mullen et al., 2017).

Subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life are important not only for counselors who provide help services, but also for their effects on clients. This is because the mutual interaction of both parties in the psychological counseling process influences the positive and negative experiences in work life and this effect continues in a reciprocal cycle. The first stage of this cycle can be considered as the risk of counselors exceeding their own limits when they share the emotional burdens of their clients and this leads to negative consequences such as burnout and compassion fatigue (Boscarino et al., 2010; Farber & Heifetz, 1981; Stamm, 2010). The second stage can be exemplified by the fact that the effectiveness of the service that counselors provide to the clients will decrease due to the fact that they are in burnout and compassion fatigue. As a matter of fact, when the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that burnout leads to negative consequences such as depersonalisation, fatigue, loss of motivation and decrease in achievement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), while compassion fatigue brings problems such as emotional fatigue, loss of energy, decrease in performance, decrease in willingness to help and empathy (Dikmen & Aydın, 2016; Hiçdurmaz & Arı İnci, 2015). Consequently, this negatively affects the therapeutic relationship with clients, diminishes the effectiveness of professional support provided, and perpetuates a vicious cycle that undermines both the counselors' professional quality of life and their subjective well-being at work (work engagement). On the other hand, the positive experiences of counselors in their professional life play a preventive role against the negative vicious circle and also contribute to its transformation into a positive one. As a matter of fact, Stamm (2010), in his professional quality of life model developed for helpers, emphasises that those helpers can develop positive emotions as a result of the professional services they provide and that this can increase their subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and compassion satisfaction levels. Therefore, negative emotions and experiences that counselors encounter in their professional lives can negatively affect their effectiveness and motivation to help (Murren & Gutierrez, 2016), while positive emotions and experiences can have a positive effect, enhancing their effectiveness and motivation (Capella & Andrew, 2004).

As a result, subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and compassion satisfaction -the key positive component of professional quality of life-- support the development of positive situations such as increased motivation and performance by enabling employees experiencing positive emotions in their professional lives and taking on more responsibility (Çankır & Arıkan, 2019; Orhaner & Mutlu, 2018; Yeşiltaş et al., 2019). In light of this, it is important to investigate what factors may affect counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and their professional quality of life. In the literature, it is noteworthy that there are limited studies with similar content on this effect for mental health professionals and counselors (e.g., Laverdière et al., 2019; Odacı et al., 2021; Sharifian, 2019; Thompson et al., 2014). In addition to this limitation, a review of studies conducted with mental health professionals suggests that factors such as **effective counselor characteristics** (Özdamar & Özeke Kocabaş, 2023; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2022) and **psychological capital** (Javaheri, 2017; Koller & Hicks, 2016; Mamacı, 2021) are among the key elements that help explain and enhance both counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and their professional quality of life.. The first of these factors, effective counselor characteristics, can be conceptualised as the basic sources of competence and effectiveness that increase the efficiency of the professional help process and are formed by the combination of technical knowledge and personal characteristics of counselors (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; İkiz & Totan, 2014). As this definition implies, effective counselor characteristics play a central role in both fulfilling the basic responsibilities of the counseling process and actively managing the difficulties of the process (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; İkiz & Totan, 2014). These characteristics, which enable counselors to use their professional competencies and provide effective support, have a function that strengthens positive experiences in professional life and reduces negative experiences. In fact, the findings of the study conducted by Özabacı et al., (2004), which revealed that counselors' burnout levels increased as they moved away from the characteristics that would make them effective, also support this. Similarly, research findings showing that effective counselor characteristics have a positive effect on counselors' professional pride and satisfaction (Özdamar & Özeke Kocabaş, 2023; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2022) support that counselors with these characteristics develop positive feelings about

professional life and increase their compassion satisfaction. Based on this, it can be suggested that the investments that counselors will make in themselves at the point of being more effective professionally will strengthen their positive experiences related to professional life. One of these investments is psychological capital (Koller & Hicks, 2016). As a matter of fact, psychological capital has an important role in Positive Organisational Behaviour, which focuses on personal resources and positive qualities of the organisation in the workplace. Psychological capital, which represents a high-level structure in Positive Organisational Behaviour, is considered as personal power resources that increase the functionality of employees with the elements of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience that constitute the basic components of this structure (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Van Den Heuvel et al., 2010). Therefore, effective counselor characteristics, which can be considered as an important investment for counselors, play a role that contributes to both the formation and strengthening of psychological capital characterised by self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. In this context, **effective counselor characteristics** can be seen as a significant investment that supports both the development and reinforcement of psychological capital. Indeed, the findings of Yayla and İkiz (2017), which demonstrated a positive relationship between effective counselor characteristics and the self-efficacy dimension of psychological capital, further support this link. As a result, psychological capital seems to have a function that strengthens the effect of effective counselor characteristics on subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life. Although there is no research in the literature that deals with all the relevant variables together, the bases that constitute the starting point of the current research on this function of psychological capital are presented in detail under the title of mediation after explaining the other variables within the scope of the research.

#### *Subjective Well-Being at Work (Work Engagement) and Professional Quality of Life*

Subjective well-being, which represents the positive aspect of mental health (Doğan & Sapmaz, 2012; Vaillant, 2003) and is also called happiness (Diener, 2000), is most generally conceptualized as experiencing positive emotions more frequently than negative emotions in life and getting high satisfaction from life. In this respect, subjective well-being serves as an indicator of how individuals evaluate their lives (Diener, 2006) and reflects positive outcomes of their cognitive and emotional assessments related to their experiences (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Doğan & Sapmaz, 2012). Similarly, subjective well-being at work refers to the positive and negative emotions individuals experience in their work life and the satisfaction derived from their work (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011). In this context, subjective well-being at work, which is also called work engagement (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012), involves a positive cognitive and emotional state characterized by dedication, vigor and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). While dedication is characterized by employees' belief that there is meaning and purpose in their work and experiencing positive emotions such as enthusiasm and pride related to work, vigor involves employees' willingness and energy to put effort into work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Finally, absorption is conceptualized as people's complete concentration on work and feeling happy while working (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Another concept that is as important as employees' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) is professional quality of life, which refers to the overall evaluation individuals make about their work (Van Laar et al., 2007). However, professional quality of life is defined by Stamm (2010) as the quality that people feel about their work, especially in terms of helpers, and is characterized by combination of compassion satisfaction, burnout and compassion fatigue. While compassion satisfaction can be defined as employees' perception that they can accomplish their work and the enjoyment they derive from it; from the perspective of helpers, it is seen that it covers all the positive feelings arising from being on the helping side (Stamm, 2010; Yeşil et al., 2010). Compassion fatigue can be explained as the cost of providing help and the empathy established during the process. It reflects the negative impact of the fatigue that occurs in the helper at the end of the process, which is based on empathy, aimed at understanding the traumatic life experiences of clients (Figley, 2002; Yeşil et al., 2010). Burnout, on the other hand, refers to negative evaluations in employees' beliefs about success and competence in their work, resulting from emotional exhaustion and displaying rigid, insensitive

attitudes towards the person they serve (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It is also possible to address the concepts of subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life in the context of counselors. Counselors play a significant role in effectively conducting the counseling process (Yalçın, 2006). One of the fundamental characteristics they must possess to ensure this effectiveness is their own psychological well-being (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Hackney & Cormier, 2008). In this regard, experiencing more positive emotions and fewer negative ones in their professional lives not only enhances counselors' well-being but also contributes to more effective counseling outcomes. Supporting this, Emre's (2019) study found that low levels of workplace stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue, combined with high levels of job satisfaction, positively influence the well-being of psychological counselors and educators..

### *Effective Counselor Characteristics*

The literature reveals a sustained interest, from past to present, in identifying the characteristics counselors must possess to be more effective and efficient in their roles (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Eryılmaz & Bek, 2019; Jackson & Thompson, 1971; Wicas & Mahan, 1966; Wiggins & Weslander, 1979). These characteristics are mainly studied within the framework of psychological counseling skills and psychological counseling self-efficacy (Pamukçu & Demir, 2013; Taytaş & Tanhan, 2021; Uslu & Arı, 2005; Emül & Öz Soysal, 2021), but in recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the fact that an effective counselor has various personal characteristics as well as the theoretical equipment acquired through professional training (Korkut-Owen et al., 2018; Yalçın, 2006). For example Jennings and Skovholt (1999) state that counselors should be effective, warm and caring in the relational sense, have self-awareness in the emotional dimension, and be able to tolerate uncertainty and be open to learning in the cognitive dimension. Ackerman and Hilsenroth (2003) highlight the positive impacts of counselor characteristics such as honesty, reliability, experience, respect, self-confidence, warmth and openness on the therapeutic relationship. Halinski (2009) points to the importance of characteristics such as flexibility, empathy, warmth and acceptance, sincerity and high self-awareness in effective counselors. Also Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2015) emphasize the importance of high self-awareness, empathy, strong observational and evaluative skills and supervisory support.

Another widely framework regarding the characteristics of effective counselors was put proposed by Cormier and Cormier (1991). According to these explanations, the characteristics that effective counselors should possess are listed as intellectual competence, energetic, flexible, high self-awareness, goodwill and supportiveness (Cormier & Cormier, 1991). *Intellectual competence* refers to the fact that counselors are individuals who can apply their professional knowledge and skills effectively and are open to continuous self-improvement (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; İkiz & Totan, 2014). *Energy* refers to counselors' ability to remain cognitively, emotionally, physically and psychologically dynamic and to transfer this dynamism to the client (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; İkiz & Totan, 2014; Skovholt, 2012). *Flexibility* is the ability of counselors to determine appropriate theories and techniques by accurately analyzing the situation and needs of clients in the face of different clients and problems (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; İkiz & Totan, 2014; Thomas, 1999). *Support* can be explained as the ability of the counselor to ensure that the client takes responsibility and feels safe during the counseling process (Corey, 2008; Cormier & Cormier, 1991), while *goodwill* reflects the counselor's consideration of the client's interests and adherence to ethical principles (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; İkiz & Totan, 2014). Finally, the quality of *self-awareness* indicates that the counselor should know his/her own limitations and strengths (Cormier & Cormier, 1991; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; İkiz & Totan, 2014).

### *Psychological Capital as a Mediating Variable*

Given the vital role counselors play in the provision of mental health services, it has become increasingly important to explore the factors that influence their positive experiences in the workplace. A review of the literature suggests that both effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital are significant predictors of counselors' subjective well-being at work (i.e., work engagement) and their professional quality of life (Ekşi et al., 2015; Javaheri, 2017; Kalay Usta & Deniz, 2019; Odacı et al., 2021; Özdamar & Özeke Kocabaş, 2023; Radeka & Hicks, 2018). In this context, the present study initially examines the relationships between effective counselor characteristics and the variables of subjective well-being at work and professional quality of life. Subsequently, it evaluates the role of psychological capital within these relationships based on existing research. Accordingly, this study discusses how effective counselor characteristics influence workplace experiences and explores the mediating role of psychological capital in this process.

First of all, effective counselor characteristics for counselors are considered key elements that have the potential to increase both subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life by increasing the effectiveness of the helping process. Research findings support this perspective by demonstrating the impact of these characteristics on the professional experiences of both practicing and prospective counselors (Özabacı et al., 2004; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2022). For example, the results of an action research involving interventions to meet the psychological needs of counselor candidates with choice theory-based practices showed a positive increase in the academic motivation and subjective well-being levels of the participants compared to before the intervention (Demir, 2021). The need for power, which stands out among these needs, is closely related to the characteristics of effective counselors as a feature that increases not only the competencies and success of psychological counselor candidates but also their subjective well-being (Demir, 2021). Because all components of effective counselor characteristics, especially intellectual competence, include the ability of counselor candidates to use their professional knowledge effectively, to develop themselves dynamically, and to plan the helping process effectively according to different problems and client needs (Cormier & Cormier, 1991). In this context, effective counselor characteristics may play a role in strengthening counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and compassion satisfaction, which is a positive component of professional quality of life, by enabling them to feel competent (Yayla & İkiz 2017). In another study in which the professional quality of life of psychotherapists was examined in a multidimensional way, empathy was found to be related to the dimensions of professional quality of life (Laverdière et al., 2019). These relationships are positive with the dimension of compassion satisfaction and negative with the dimension of burnout. However, although there was a statistical trend, it was found that compassion fatigue did not show a significant relationship with the empathy of the psychotherapists, and it was emphasized that this may be due to excessive identification with the client and intense countertransference in long-term therapies. Consequently, the study emphasized that the use of empathy without becoming overly immersed in the client's experiences—i.e., without crossing into a sympathetic response—may enhance professional quality of life (Laverdière et al., 2019).. As a matter of fact, empathy is one of the basic skills that contribute to the success of effective counselors (Yılmaz & Ergene, 2022), but it can also be considered as a critical component that poses a risk for compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995). In this context, it can be said that being supportive and self-awareness, which are among the effective counselor characteristics, contribute to the effective use of empathy. In other words, exhibiting a supportive attitude without taking responsibility for the client and not reflecting one's own attitudes to the client and the process with self-awareness can be considered as qualities that strengthen the counselor's ability to stay on the empathic plane and manage countertransference effectively. When these explanations and the results of Laverdière et al.'s (2019) study are considered together, it is thought that effective counselor characteristics have a role affecting professional quality of life. Supporting this view, a recent study investigating the mediating role of effective counselor characteristics in the relationship between supervision behaviors, professional pride, and compassion satisfaction found that these characteristics had a positive effect on both professional pride and compassion satisfaction, with supervision behaviors

playing a partial mediating role (Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2023). In the light of these results in the literature, it is clear that it has become increasingly important to examine the factors that affect positive experiences in work life for mental health professionals who provide helping services and at the same time strengthen the characteristics of effective counselors. As a matter of fact, in line with this need, the concept of psychological capital, which stands out among positive organizational behaviors, has gained more and more importance in business life and has been the subject of research (Erkuş & Afacan Fındıklı, 2013; Wardani & Anwar, 2019; Yeni & Sezici, 2022). The concept of psychological capital has a role that is both influenced by the effective counselor characteristics (Yayla & İkiz, 2017) and protects and strengthens subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life (Alessandri et al., 2018; Çakmak ve Arabacı, 2017; Joo et al., 2016; Ocak ve Güler, 2017). Therefore, psychological capital provides a dynamic that increases the professional quality of life and well-being at work by helping to balance positive and negative work-related experiences, and in this respect, it is of great value to mental health professionals.

Psychological capital is an umbrella concept that emphasizes the unique and developable psychological structures of individuals (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand the components of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience that make up psychological capital in order to understand its impact on effective counselor characteristics and experiences in professional life. Self-efficacy, which constitutes the first component of psychological capital, reflects individuals' beliefs that they can exhibit the necessary behaviors to achieve the results they aim for and that they have the necessary personal abilities and resources (Bandura, 2010; Maddux & Kleiman, 2016). The second component, hope, refers to having the motivation to identify alternative ways to achieve a certain goal and to realize these ways (Luthans et al., 2015; Snyder et al., 1991). While optimism includes positive perception of the events encountered and positive expectations for the future (Luthans & Youssef, 2004), resilience is explained as the capacity to remain strong in the face of negative life events by drawing strength from internal and external resources (Özer & Deniz, 2014; Yates et al., 2003). All these components of psychological capital make it understandable how it is related to effective counselor characteristics and how it contributes to subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life. Effective counselors are individuals who engage in continuous self-development, have the intellectual and cognitive competence to carry out the counseling process efficiently, and have high self-awareness about these competencies (Hackney & Cormier, 2008). In addition, effective counselors carry a strong sense of hope and optimism about their clients' potential to achieve their goals and convey this positive outlook to their clients (Wampold, 2011). Effective counselors are able to maintain their energy in the face of the demanding nature of the profession (İkiz & Totan, 2014) and effectively manage the stress factors they may encounter due to the counseling process (Corey, 2008; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). From this point of view, it is clear that all these characteristics of effective counselors are actually the source of psychological capital consisting of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience components. Indeed, the literature emphasizes that counselors should have resilience (Skovholt, 2012), high self-efficacy belief (Pamukçu & Demir, 2013), hope and optimism (Wampold, 2011). In a study supporting the hypothesis that mental health professionals have high psychological well-being (Koller & Hicks, 2016), it was found that "environmental mastery" and "personal development and growth" are two main areas of strength. In this context, it is emphasized that the feeling of dominance in the workplace environment has a trust-building effect and is related to hope and optimism, which are identified as important elements in psychological capital (Koller & Hicks, 2016). As a result, psychological capital, with all its components, has a functionality that feeds on the characteristics of effective counselors and at the same time enhances the impact of these characteristics. When they come together, they strengthen the potential of individuals to create a higher quality work experience by supporting their well-being while increasing their success at work. This power is closely linked to the relationship between psychological capital and effective counselor characteristics as well as its relationship with subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and all elements of professional quality of life (compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue).

Psychological capital and its components are crucial factors in enhancing employees' subjective well-being at work (work engagement). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) emphasize that in addition to work-related resources (such as autonomy, social support), personal resources such as hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience, i.e. psychological capital, are effective in the formation of work engagement. This is supported by the research findings that reveal the positive relationship between psychological capital and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) in the literature (Joo et al., 2016; Karatepe & Karadas, 2015; Simons & Buitendach, 2013). For instance, in a study conducted by Siu (2013) with healthcare professionals, psychological capital was found to significantly enhance both subjective well-being at work and the ability to maintain work-life balance. The study emphasized that components of psychological capital—such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience—play a vital role in shaping employees' positive perceptions of their work lives. In a similar study examining the role of psychological capital and coping styles in the psychological well-being levels of school counselors, it was found that self-efficacy, optimism and hope components of psychological capital are important predictors of psychological well-being (Odacı et al., 2021). The results of the study by Bolelli (2020), in which the effect of psychological capital on subjective well-being was examined, show that all components of psychological capital positively explain subjective well-being and hope has the highest effect. This situation not only reflects on the well-being of mental health workers but also creates positive results for clients. Indeed, Koller and Hicks (2016) point out that mental health workers generally have high psychological well-being and provide a positive environment for their clients as well as their own psychological well-being through their psychological capital, especially optimism and hope components.

Psychological capital is closely related to subjective well-being at work (work engagement) as well as employees' professional quality of life (Bıyık & Aydoğan, 2017; Wardani & Anwar, 2019). In its broadest sense, professional quality of life reflects the balance between negative experiences—such as workplace difficulties, pressures, and challenges—and positive experiences, including job satisfaction, success, and personal development (Stamm, 2010; Yeşil et al., 2010). Burnout and compassion fatigue, which are among the negative dimensions of professional quality of life, may occur as a result of the inadequacy of people's environmental and personal resources to meet the demands of work and to cope with the stress brought by work (Freudenberger, 1974; Ocak & Güler, 2017; Yeşil et al., 2010). Compassion satisfaction, which constitutes the positive dimension of professional quality of life, reflects the pleasure felt from the job (Stamm, 2010). In line with all these literature emphases, it is thought that psychological capital, which consists of self-efficacy belief, hope, optimism and resilience components and reflects the developable psychological strengths of individuals, may have a preventive effect on burnout and compassion fatigue and strengthen compassion satisfaction. Empirical findings support this view, indicating that psychological capital is negatively associated with burnout (Ocak & Güler, 2017; Tösten et al., 2017) and compassion fatigue (Bao & Taliaferro, 2015), and positively associated with compassion satisfaction (Çakmak & Arabacı, 2017; Erkuş & Fındıklı, 2013) and job satisfaction (Akçay, 2011; Oğuzhan et al., 2017).

In conclusion, considering the positive effects of both effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital on subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life, psychological capital has the potential to strengthen these effects for counselors. In fact, studies emphasizing the importance of effective counselor characteristics suggest that when counselors possess traits that contribute to their professional effectiveness, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as increased professional commitment, compassion satisfaction, and professional pride (Özdamar & Özeke Kocabaş, 2023; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2022). Similarly, in the literature, it is emphasized that counselors need to have characteristics such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience, in short, a strong psychological capital, in order to be more effective in work life (Pamukçu ve Demir, 2013; Skovholt, 2012; Wampold, 2011). Ultimately, psychological capital does not reflect a fixed structure, but represents a higher structure that goes beyond resources such as knowledge, skills and experience exemplified as human capital with its changeable and improvable structure (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans et al., 2004). Therefore, it is expected that counselors with effective counselor

characteristics will have more positive experiences in their professional lives and have strong psychological capital, and this is thought to have positive effects on business life. Indeed, in a study conducted by Javaheri (2017), it was found that counseling students with high levels of psychological capital had better mental health and lower levels of academic and clinical stress. For counselors, psychological capital and characteristics that strengthen positive experiences at work not only provide a protective effect against professional difficulties, but also play a significant role in the quality of the service they provide and the satisfaction of their clients (Aniyatussaidah & Herdi, 2023; Mamacı, 2021; Odacı et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Mamacı (2021), it was found that counselors used deep role-playing strategies more than other helping professions and consciously changed their real emotions in order to display appropriate emotions to their environment, and this situation was seen to create satisfaction by the service recipients. In the same study, it was emphasized that examining the concepts of psychological capital and well-being in professional groups working in the field of mental health could make significant contributions to strategies to increase efficiency in these services. In addition, another striking finding of the study is that counselors have significantly higher psychological capital than psychiatrists and psychologists (Mamacı, 2021). In this context, it is important to determine the factors that explain both psychological capital and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life of counselors.

In summary, when all the emphases in the literature are evaluated as a whole;

- The growing importance of studies on positive experiences at work
- Subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life have a deeper meaning for mental health workers due to the challenges inherent in the profession,
- For counselors, one of the elements that explain these experiences is that effective counselor characteristics come first,
- Psychological capital as a developable personal resource is both related to effective counselor characteristics and has a function that increases positive experiences such as work engagement and professional quality of life, yet there is no study that addresses the relevant variables as a whole,

were the starting point of this study. Based on this point, the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life was examined in the research and it was aimed to determine the mediating role of psychological capital in this relationship. The hypotheses determined for this purpose are presented below.

### ***Hypotheses of the Study***

1. The mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and their subjective well-being at work (work engagement) is significant.
2. The mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and the components of professional quality of life (compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue and burnout) is significant.

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study was designed to test a model aimed at determining the effect of effective counselor characteristics on counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life, as well as the mediating role of psychological capital in this relationship. The study is based on the relational survey model, which can be described as a research model that seeks to identify whether two or more variables change in parallel with each other, and to measure the degree of this change, if any (Karasar, 2016). In this research, effective counselor characteristics are considered as the predictor variable, while subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life are treated as the predicted variables. Psychological capital is examined as a mediating variable.

### Research Group

In this study, counselors who are in active working life among the professionals serving in the field of mental health in Türkiye constitute the research group. Criterion sampling method was used to determine the research group. Criterion sampling requires the research group to meet some predetermined criteria (Baltacı, 2018). The criteria set for this study were that participants must have graduated from an undergraduate program in Guidance and Psychological Counseling or Psychological Services in Education, and be employed in either the public or private sector during the data collection period. Although 460 mental health professionals were reached during the data collection process, the data of 127 participants who did not meet the research criteria of being graduates of the Guidance and Psychological Counseling or Psychological Services in Education undergraduate program and being actively employed were not included in the study. As a result, the research group of the study consists of 333 psychological counselors. Information regarding the participants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic information

| Variables               | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------------|----------|------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |          |      |
| Female                  | 218      | 65.5 |
| Male                    | 115      | 34.5 |
| <b>Age</b>              |          |      |
| 20-25                   | 57       | 17.1 |
| 26-30                   | 107      | 32.1 |
| 31-35                   | 72       | 21.6 |
| 36+                     | 97       | 29.1 |
| <b>Education status</b> |          |      |
| Bachelor's degree       | 229      | 68.8 |
| Postgraduate            | 104      | 31.2 |
| <b>Experience</b>       |          |      |
| 0-5 years               | 136      | 40.8 |
| 6-10 years              | 90       | 27.0 |
| 11-20 years             | 68       | 20.4 |
| 21 years+               | 39       | 11.7 |

### Data Collection Tools

*Effective Counselor Characteristics Assessment Scale (ECCAS)*: The scale developed by İkiz and Totan (2014) measures the characteristics that should be present in effective counselors. It consists of 26 items (sample item; I have information about psychological counseling skills) and 6 sub-dimensions: intellectual competence, energy, flexibility, support, self-awareness, and goodwill. The scale is scored using a five-point Likert scale (1 = It does not qualify me at all, 5 = It qualifies me completely). There are no reverse-scored items in the scale. A high score on the scale indicates a high perception of being an effective counselor. As a result of the second level confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted to examine the six-factor theoretical model for the sub-dimensions of the scale, the measurement model was confirmed. The internal consistency of the scale was reported as ".90" and the test-retest reliability coefficient as ".74" (İkiz & Totan, 2014). The alpha reliability coefficient calculated in our current study is .92.

*Psychological Capital Scale (PCS)*: The scale was developed by Luthans et al. (2007) to measure "psychological capital" and the adaptation studies for the Turkish version were conducted by Akçay (2011). The 24-item scale (sample item; I am currently trying to achieve my work goals energetically) has 4 sub-dimensions: hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience. The Likert-type scale is scored on a five-point scale (1= Does not describe me at all, 5= Describes me very well). Items 13, 20 and 23 are reverse scored. A high score on the scale indicates that individuals have high levels of psychological

capital. According to the results of the factor analysis conducted to measure construct validity, it was stated that the scale preserved its 4-factor structure. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was reported as .97 (Akçay, 2011). The alpha reliability coefficient calculated in our current study is .90.

*Professional Quality of Life Scale (PQLS)*: The Professional Quality of Life Scale, developed by Stamm (2005) to measure the professional quality of life of employees, was adapted into Turkish by Yeşil et al. (2010). It consists of 30 items (sample item; I feel stronger after helping others) and is divided into 3 sub-dimensions as "compassion satisfaction", "burnout" and "compassion fatigue". The Likert-type scale is scored on a six-point scale (0=Never, 5=Very often). Items 1, 4, 15, 17 and 29 are reverse scored. A total score cannot be obtained from the scale; however, high scores obtained from the compassion satisfaction subscale indicate that employees are highly satisfied with their work. A high score on the burnout subscale indicates a high level of burnout, while a high score on the compassion fatigue subscale indicates that employees experience a high degree of compassion fatigue. The external validity of the scale was deemed sufficient as a result of the correlation values ( $r = .39$   $r = .40$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between the Brief Symptom Inventory (Şahin & Durak, 1994) and the Burnout Inventory (Ergin, 1992) used within the scope of criterion-related validity. While Cronbach's alpha values were reported as .84 for the whole scale, they were .81, .83 and .62 for compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue and burnout, respectively (Yeşil et al., 2010). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients calculated in our study were .79 for the overall scale, .87 for compassion satisfaction, .87 for compassion fatigue and .68 for burnout. If this value is above .70, the scale can be said to be reliable; however, if the number of questions in the subscales is limited, .60 can also be accepted as the reliability limit (Sipahi et al., 2010). Based on this, it is concluded that the overall scale and its sub-dimensions have reliable values.

*Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)*: The scale designed to measure subjective well-being at work (work engagement) was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Eryılmaz and Doğan (2012). The scale consists of 17 items (sample item; I am willing and enthusiastic about my job) and 3 sub-dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption on work. It is a Likert-type scale scored on a five-point scale (1=Not at all favorable, 5=Fully favorable). A high score on the scale indicates that the person has a high level of work engagement. The construct validity of the scale was examined through confirmatory factor analysis and it was seen that the 3-factor structure was confirmed. Within the scope of reliability examinations, the test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .85 and the alpha internal consistency value of the scale was calculated as .94 (Eryılmaz & Doğan, 2012). The alpha reliability coefficient calculated in our current study is .95.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection tools used in this study were determined based on the research objectives. After obtaining permission for use from the original authors, the necessary legal approvals to conduct the research were secured during the 2018-2019 academic year from the Eskişehir Provincial Directorate of National Education and the Eskişehir Osmangazi University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Board. The data collection tools, including the Participant Consent Form, were transferred to an online platform (Google Forms). The form was then distributed to participants via WhatsApp and Facebook groups that included psychological counselors. The participants were also reached by phone and e-mail in order to send the form.. As a result, research data were collected online from volunteer participants.

### **Data Analysis**

In the data analysis phase, firstly, skewness and kurtosis values were examined to understand whether the variables were normally distributed or not, and the normal distribution range of the variables was examined between -1.96 and +1.96 (Kerr et al., 2002). The obtained skewness and kurtosis coefficients were found to be normally distributed for all variables (-.22, -.26 for counselor characteristics, .08, .04 for psychological capital, -.68, .66 for compassion satisfaction, .40, -.42 for compassion fatigue, -.30, -.29 for burnout, and -.78, 1.29 for work engagement). Then, in order to

evaluate the multivariate normal distribution of the variables for regression analysis and the linearity of the relationship between them, P-P plots and scatter diagrams were examined based on standardized residuals and predicted values. In the P-P plot of standardized residuals, it was observed that the residuals formed a diagonal line from the bottom left corner to the top right corner, which was interpreted as the normality assumption being met, similar to a histogram. Likewise, in the scatter diagram created for standardized residuals and standardized predicted values, it was seen that the values were distributed around a 45 degree axis, indicating a linear relationship. In addition, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Condition Index (CI) values were examined to determine whether there were multiple correlation and multicollinearity problems and it was found that the highest VIF value was 1.812 ( $<10$ ), the highest tolerance value was .552 ( $>0.2$ ) and the highest conditional index value was  $CI=26.44$  ( $<30$ ). These results indicate that the data do not have multicollinearity problem (Akbulut, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Özdamar, 2004). Finally, the Durbin Watson coefficient was calculated to determine whether there is an autocorrelation problem among all variables and it was found to be in the expected range (1.5-2.5 range) (Kalaycı, 2010) with values between 1.78 and 2.10.

In the research, mediation analyses were analyzed using the "PROCESS Macro regression-based bootstrapping" method developed by Hayes (2018). Bootstrapping method can be explained as a resampling method based on accepting the research sample as the universe and creating subsamples from the data according to this accepted universe (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). In the research, the models were realized by performing 10,000 bootstraps and bootstrapping coefficient and confidence intervals for the models were created accordingly.

## Results

In this study, it was aimed to determine the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics, subjective well-being at work levels and professional quality of life of counselors. Firstly, correlations between variables were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation Analysis Coefficients of Variables

| Variables                                                        | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1. Subjective well-being at work (SWW)                           | -      |        |        |        |        |       |
| 2. <sup>PQ</sup> Compassion satisfaction ( <sup>PQOL</sup> - CS) | .74**  | -      |        |        |        |       |
| 3. <sup>PQ</sup> Compassion fatigue ( <sup>PQOL</sup> - CF)      | -.25** | -.23** | -      |        |        |       |
| 4. <sup>PQ</sup> Burnout ( <sup>PQOL</sup> - B)                  | -.51** | -.54** | .71**  | -      |        |       |
| 5. Effective counselor characteristics (ECC)                     | .61**  | .56**  | -.23** | -.40** | -      |       |
| 6. Psychological capital (PsyCap)                                | .66**  | .60**  | -.37** | -.56** | .67**  | -     |
| Mean                                                             | 65.90  | 41.29  | 17.89  | 25.63  | 106.62 | 93.52 |
| Std. Deviation                                                   | 11.74  | 6.03   | 9.42   | 6.80   | 11.71  | 11.70 |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; <sup>PQ</sup> Professional quality of life sub-dimension

As seen in the correlation findings, all variables in the study were found to have statistically significant relationships with SWW and all of the sub-dimensions of professional quality of life. According to the correlation values obtained and the direction of the values, SWW is positively correlated with <sup>PQOL</sup>- CS ( $r = .74, p < .01$ ), ECC ( $r = .61, p < .01$ ) and PsyCap ( $r = .66, p < .01$ ). It was found that SWW was negatively correlated with <sup>PQOL</sup>- CF ( $r = -.25, p < .01$ ) and <sup>PQOL</sup>- B ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ). When the values in terms of professional quality of life sub-dimensions and other variables were analyzed, it was found that there was a positive relationship between <sup>PQOL</sup>- CS and ECC ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) and PsyCap ( $r = .60, p < .01$ ), while these relationships were negative for <sup>PQOL</sup>- CF ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ) and <sup>PQOL</sup>- B ( $r = -.54, p < .01$ ). Another sub-dimension of professional quality of life, <sup>PQOL</sup>- CF, was found to be negatively correlated with ECC ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ) and PsyCap ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ) and positively correlated with <sup>PQOL</sup>- B ( $r = .71, p < .01$ ). While there was a negative relationship between <sup>PQOL</sup>- B and ECC ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ) and

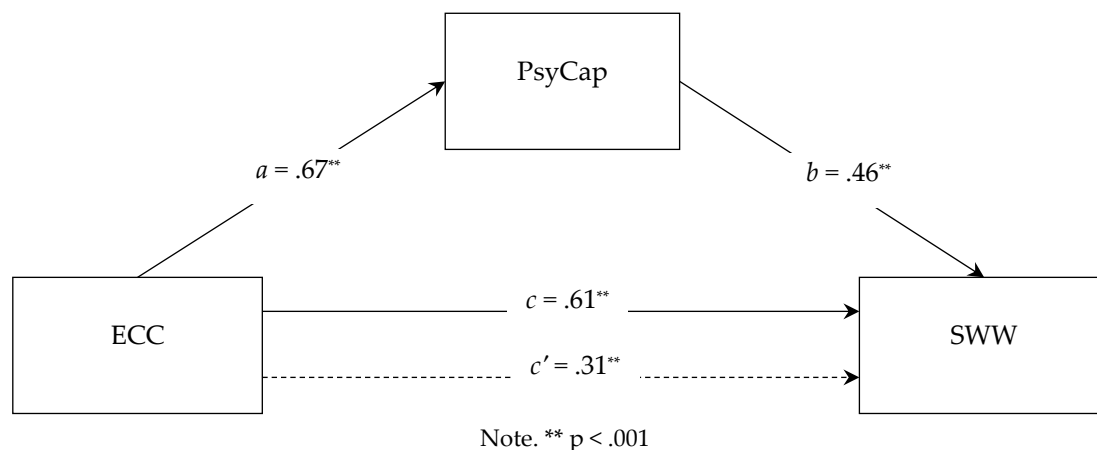
PsyCap ( $r = -.56, p < .01$ ), there was a positive relationship between ECC and PsyCap ( $r = .67, p < .01$ ). From this point of view, it can be said individuals who have high scores on ECC tend to have higher scores on their PsyCap, SWW (work engagement), and PQOL- CS, while they tend to have lower scores in PQOL- B and PQOL- CF. Strong PsyCap of counselors supports them to experience SWW (work engagement) and PQOL- CS in work life, while it is seen to have a preventive quality in terms of experiencing PQOL- B and PQOL- CF.

In the study, the findings related to the mediation models established to examine the mediation effect of PsyCap on the relationship between ECC and counselors' SWW (work engagement) and professional quality of life were examined under two headings.

***Findings on the Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Effective Counselor Characteristics and Subjective Well-Being at Work***

The model established to examine the mediating effect of PsyCap between ECC and SWW was examined by bootstrap analysis method and the findings are presented in Figure 1.

As seen in Figure 1, ECC are a significant predictor of PsyCap ( $a = .67, p < .001$ ) and PsyCap is a significant predictor of SWW (work engagement) ( $b = .46, p < .001$ ). While ECC have a total effect of .61 on SWW (work engagement), this effect decreases to .31 when the mediator variable PsyCap is included in the model. The obtained values show that PsyCap has a partial mediation effect.



**Figure 1.** Mediation of Psychological Capital between ECC and SWW (Work Engagement)

Bootstrapping coefficient and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the significance of the effects for the model in Figure 1 are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Mediation of PsyCap between ECC and SWW (Work Engagement): Bootstrapping Findings

| Indirect impact    | Bootstrap Coefficient | SH  | %95 CIs     |             | R <sup>2</sup> | F(3, 33) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
|                    |                       |     | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap → SWW | .30                   | .04 | .23         | .39         | .49            | 155.97   |
| Direct impacts     | Coefficient           | SH  | t value     |             |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap       | .67                   | .04 | 16.39**     |             |                |          |
| ECC → SWW          | .31                   | .05 | 5.77**      |             |                |          |
| PsyCap → SWW       | .46                   | .06 | 6.64**      |             |                |          |

Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the model established for SWW (work engagement) is significant [ $F(3, 33) = 155.97, p < .001$ ] and PsyCap has a significant indirect effect between ECC and SWW (work engagement) (bootstrap coefficient = .30, 95% CI = .23, .39).

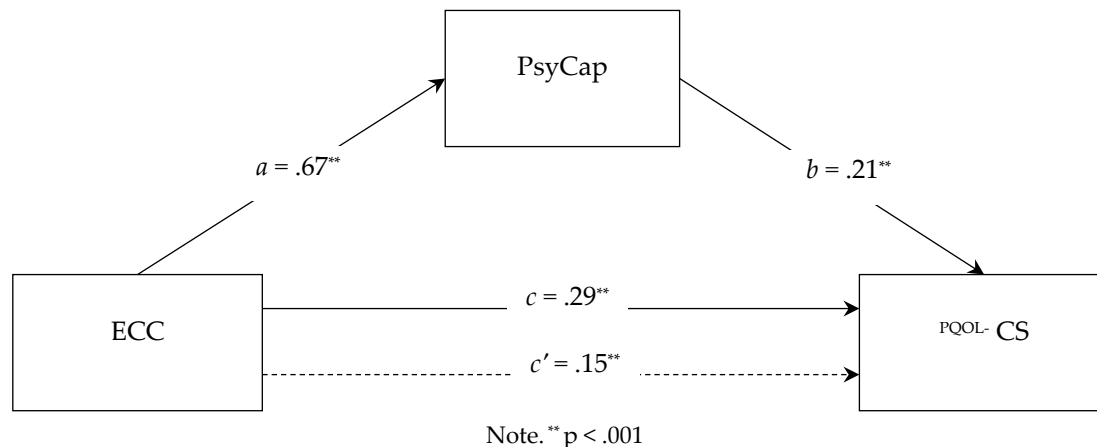
***Effective Counselor Characteristics and Professional Quality of Life: Findings on the Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout***

The mediating effect of PsyCap on the relationship between ECC and professional quality of life was examined by establishing three different models in line with the sub-dimensions of professional quality of life ( $^{PQOL-}$  CS,  $^{PQOL-}$  CF,  $^{PQOL-}$  B).

***Findings Regarding Compassion Satisfaction***

The model established to determine the mediating effect of PsyCap on the relationship between ECC and  $^{PQOL-}$  CS was examined by bootstrap analysis method and the findings are presented in Figure 2.

As seen in Figure 2, ECC are a direct positive predictor of PsyCap ( $a = .67, p < .001$ ) and PsyCap is a direct positive predictor of  $^{PQOL-}$  CS ( $b = .21, p < .001$ ). While ECC had a total effect of .29 on  $^{PQOL-}$  CS, this effect decreased to .15 when PsyCap was included in the model and this value was significant. The obtained values show that PsyCap has a partial mediation effect.



**Figure 2.** Mediation of *PsyCap* Between ECC and  $^{PQOL-}$  CS

Bootstrapping coefficient and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) calculated for the significance of the effects for the model analyzed in Figure 2 are presented below (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Bootstrapping Results on the Mediation of PsyCap between ECC and  $^{PQOL-}$  CS

| Indirect impact                                      | Bootstrap Coefficient | SH          | %95 CIs     |             | $R^2$ | $F(3, 33)$ |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|------------|
|                                                      |                       |             | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |       |            |
| ECC $\rightarrow$ PsyCap $\rightarrow$ $^{PQOL-}$ CS | .14                   | .02         | .10         | .18         | .40   | 111.55     |
| Direct impacts                                       |                       | Coefficient | SH          | t value     |       |            |
| ECC $\rightarrow$ PsyCap                             |                       | .67         | .04         | 16.39**     |       |            |
| ECC $\rightarrow$ $^{PQOL-}$ CS                      |                       | .15         | .03         | 5.18**      |       |            |
| PsyCap $\rightarrow$ $^{PQOL-}$ CS                   |                       | .21         | .03         | 6.94**      |       |            |

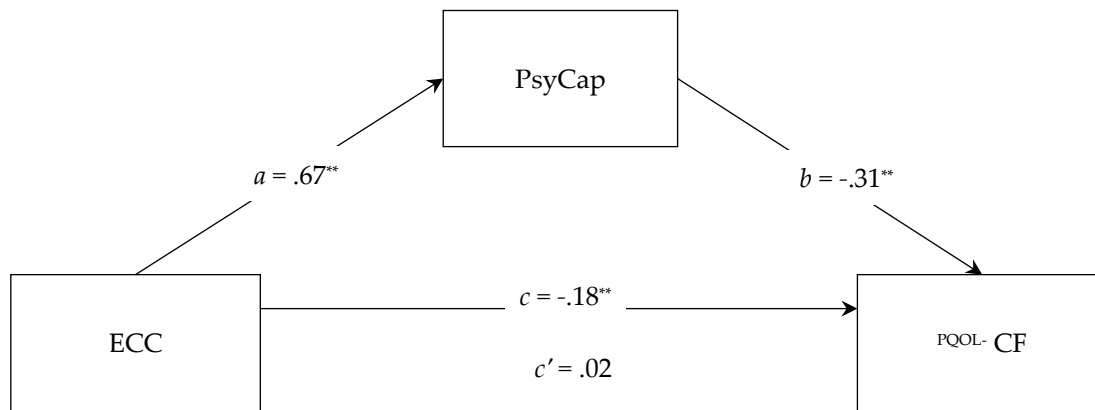
Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that the model established for <sup>PQOL</sup>-CS is significant [ $F(3, 33) = 111.55, p < .001$ ] and PsyCap has a significant indirect effect between ECC and <sup>PQOL</sup>-CS (bootstrap coefficient = .14, 95% CI = .10, .18).

#### Findings Regarding Compassion Fatigue

The model established to determine the mediating effect of PsyCap on the relationship between ECC of counselors and <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF was examined by bootstrap analysis method and the findings are presented in Figure 3.

As seen in Figure 3, ECC are a direct positive predictor of PsyCap ( $a = .67, p < .001$ ), whereas PsyCap is a direct negative predictor of <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF ( $b = -.31, p < .001$ ). Here, while ECC had a total effect of -.18 on <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF, this effect was .02 and not significant with the inclusion of the PsyCap mediator variable in the model. The obtained values show that PsyCap has a full mediation effect.



Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

**Figure 3.** Mediation of *PsyCap* between *ECC* and <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF

Bootstrapping coefficient and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) calculated for the significance of the effects for the model analyzed in Figure 3 are presented below (Table 5).

**Table 5.** The Mediation of *PsyCap* between *ECC* and <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF: Bootstrapping Findings

| Indirect impact                    | Bootstrap Coefficient | SH  | %95 CIs     |             | R <sup>2</sup> | F(3, 33) |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
|                                    |                       |     | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap → <sup>PQOL</sup> -CF | -.21                  | .05 | -.31        | -.11        | .13            | 25.51    |
| Direct impacts                     | Coefficient           | SH  | t value     |             |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap                       | .67                   | .04 | 16.39**     |             |                |          |
| ECC → <sup>PQOL</sup> -CF          | .02                   | .06 | 0.39        |             |                |          |
| PsyCap → <sup>PQOL</sup> -CF       | -.31                  | .06 | -.093**     |             |                |          |

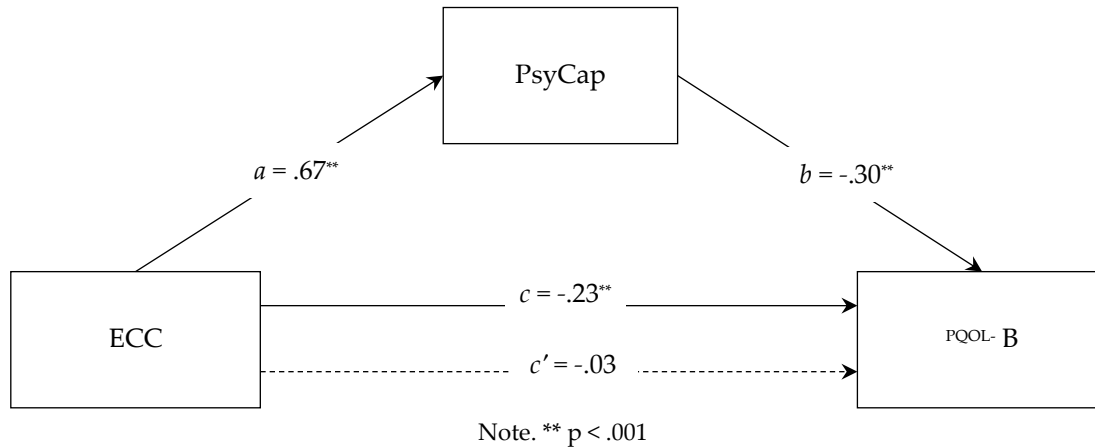
Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the model established for <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF is significant [ $F(3, 33) = 25.51, p < .001$ ] and PsyCap has a significant indirect effect between ECC and <sup>PQOL</sup>-CF (bootstrap coefficient = -.21, 95% CI = -.31, -.11).

### Findings Regarding Burnout

The model established to determine the mediating role of PsyCap in the relationship between ECC and <sup>PQOL-</sup> B was examined by bootstrap analysis method and the findings are presented in Figure 4.

When Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that ECC of counselors directly predict PsyCap positively ( $a = .67, p < .001$ ), while PsyCap level predicts <sup>PQOL-</sup> B negatively. ( $b = -.30, p < .001$ ). While counselor characteristics had a total effect of  $-.23$  on <sup>PQOL-</sup> B, this effect was  $-.03$  and not significant with the inclusion of the PsyCap mediator variable in the model. From this point of view, it was found that PsyCap showed full mediation effect in the established model.



**Figure 4.** Mediation of PsyCap between ECC and <sup>PQOL-</sup> B

Bootstrapping coefficient and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) calculated for the significance of the effects related to the model analyzed in Figure 4 are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Mediation of PsyCap between ECC and <sup>PQOL-</sup> B: Bootstrapping Findings

| Indirect impact                   | Bootstrap Coefficient | SH  | %95 CIs     |             | R <sup>2</sup> | F(3. 33) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
|                                   |                       |     | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap → <sup>PQOL-</sup> B | -.20                  | .03 | -.26        | -.15        | .31            | 74.33    |
| Direct impacts                    | Coefficient           | SH  | t value     |             |                |          |
| ECC → PsyCap                      | .67                   | .04 | 16.39**     |             |                |          |
| ECC → <sup>PQOL-</sup> B          | -.03                  | .04 | -0.83       |             |                |          |
| PsyCap → <sup>PQOL-</sup> B       | -.30                  | .04 | 3.68**      |             |                |          |

Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that the model established for <sup>PQOL-</sup> B, one of the sub-dimensions of professional quality of life, is significant [ $F(3. 33) = 74.33, p < .001$ ] and PsyCap has a significant indirect effect between ECC and <sup>PQOL-</sup> B (bootstrap coefficient =  $-.20$ , 95% CI =  $-.26, -.15$ ).

### Discussion

The relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work (work engagement), as well as professional quality of life (compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, burnout), and the mediating role of psychological capital in these relationships were discussed under two main headings, based on the literature. First, the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) was evaluated. Second, the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and professional quality of life was discussed.

### ***Discussion on the Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Effective Counselor Characteristics and Subjective Well-Being at Work (Work Engagement)***

The first direct effect that can be addressed in the research regarding the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and subjective well-being at work (work engagement) is the effect of effective counselor characteristics on psychological capital. According to the research results, it was found that effective counselor characteristics positively predicted psychological capital. In this context, it is expected that the professional investments that counselors make in themselves will also strengthen their psychological capital. As a matter of fact, it is very important for an effective counselor to be intellectually competent, supportive, well-intentioned, energetic, flexible and self-aware (İkiz & Totan, 2014) as well as being psychologically healthy (Hackney & Cormier, 2008). In this context, studies emphasizing the importance of counselors' high levels of self-efficacy beliefs (Pamukçu & Demir, 2013), hope and optimism (Wampold, 2011), and resilience (Skovholt, 2012) highlight the necessity for counselors to possess a strong psychological capital. Because effective counselors, in addition to having the necessary equipment to strengthen the psychological capital of their clients, are also important models for their clients with their own feelings, thoughts and behaviors (Egan, 2011). Therefore, it is of great importance for an effective counselor to strengthen their own psychological capital by applying their professional knowledge to their own life first.

Another noteworthy point in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital is that counselors grow alongsidewith their clients during the counseling process. Carkhuff's (2014) definition of the art of helping as "the success of the helper to grow with the client" also supports this. Counselors who directly witness the growth and development in their clients at the end of an effective counseling process can reach a stronger psychological structure through this experience. For example, Silveira and Boyer (2015) reported that counselors experienced positive developments in their own well-being (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope) in the face of their clients' development during the counseling process. In this context, it is possible to say that counselors who support their clients in strengthening their psychological capital also invest in their own psychological capital. However, no research has been found in the relevant literature in which effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital are directly examined together. On the other hand, the literature includes numerous studies focusing on the sub-dimensions of psychological capital such as "hope", "optimism", "self-efficacy" and "resilience". One of these studies was conducted by Çapri and Demiröz (2016) and it was found that effective counselor characteristics played a full mediating role between emotional intelligence and counseling self-efficacy beliefs. Similarly, in the study conducted by Yayla and İkiz (2017), a positive relationship between effective counselor characteristics and counseling self-efficacy was reported. In another study, it was found that effective counselor characteristics were positively associated with cognitive flexibility and significantly predicted cognitive flexibility (Buyruk-Genç & Yüksel-Şahin, 2020).

Another direct effect that can be addressed according to the model is the effect of effective counselor characteristics on subjective well-being at work (work engagement). Counselors with effective counselor characteristics tend to make positive cognitive evaluations about their work life, leading to increased work engagement and more positive emotional experiences. Although there is no study in the literature that directly reveals the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and work engagement, the existing emphases indicate that the relationship between the two concepts is in the expected direction. For example, employees with high work engagement are considered to be effective, productive, energetic, and highly motivated people in work life (Gülbahar, 2017; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2008). On the other hand, being an effective counselor requires continuous efforts for both professional and personal development and having the necessary energy and motivation to sustain this effort. Therefore, the physical, emotional, and cognitive efforts made by counselors (İkiz & Totan, 2014) and the fact that professionals find their work inspiring and meaningful as a result of the help service

provided to individuals as an effective counselor (McLeod, 2009), play a crucial role in their experience of work engagement. In fact, work engagement refers to an energetic state that requires individuals to give themselves physically, emotionally and cognitively to their work (Kahn, 1990), that is related to people's willingness to spend effort on work, to concentrate on work, to find meaning in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and that employees believe that they are effective in their work (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

Another direct effect that can be examined within the scope of the research is the effect of psychological capital on subjective well-being at work (work engagement). The results of the study show that counselors' investment in their psychological capital has a positive effect on their level of subjective well-being at work (work engagement). The literature emphasizes how work engagement is formed, highlighting work-related factors such as autonomy and social support, as well as personal resources like self-efficacy and resilience (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). It also underscores the importance of employees' psychological structures (psychological capital), which include power resources like self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience.. Employees with high psychological capital are those who possess positive expectations about work (optimism), believe in their ability to succeed in their professional lives (self-efficacy and hope), and demonstrate greater resilience when dealing with challenging situations (Luthans et al., 2007). Employees with high work engagement are individuals who concentrate fully on their work by spending energy and effort to achieve success, find meaning in their work, and have positive feelings about their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Therefore, it is thought that employees' positive feelings and expectations about their jobs, having the necessary hope and self-efficacy beliefs to succeed in the job and being able to put forth sufficient effort, and remaining resilient in the face of challenging situations encountered in business life, in short, having a strong psychological capital, will support work engagement. As a matter of fact, various studies conducted on different professional groups provide findings that support the relationship between psychological capital and work engagement (Alessandri et al., 2018; Joo et al., 2016; Karatepe & Karadas, 2015; Simons & Buitendach, 2013).

In the hypothetical model established in the study, in addition to direct effects, the mediation effect was also found to be significant. Psychological capital plays a partial mediating role in the effect of effective counselor characteristics on subjective well-being at work (work engagement). In other words, the effect of effective counseling characteristics of counselors on their subjective well-being at work (work engagement) increases through psychological capital. These results once again highlight the importance of employees' personal and work-related resources in the development of work engagement. Indeed, effective counselors have various characteristics in relational, cognitive, emotional and psychological areas (Hackney & Cormier, 2008; İkiz & Totan, 2014; Jennings & Skovholt, 1999; Wampold, 2011) and these characteristics actually play a supportive role for the development of counselors' work engagement. These characteristics can also be considered as competencies that serve as resources for their psychological capital. The National Occupational Standard for Psychological Counselors, prepared by the Vocational Qualifications Authority of Türkiye (VQA, 2017), highlights that counselors should not only have the professional skills and technical knowledge necessary to improve themselves and the counseling process but also possess traits such as awareness of their physical and mental health, competence, and flexibility. These traits align with the components of psychological capital. Possessing characteristics that enable counselors to develop professionally and remain effective enhances both their mental health and work life (Kalay Usta & Deniz, 2019; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2022; Yıldırım Kurtuluş & Yüksel Şahin, 2023) while also strengthening their psychological capital and its components (Hou, 2015; Yayla & İkiz, 2017). This situation can be considered as a positive cycle because psychological capital allows counselors to support their mental health and protect themselves from work-related stress (Javaheri, 2017). When these emphases in the literature are considered as a whole, it can be said that it is an expected outcome for psychological capital to serve as a bridge between counselors possessing features that will make them more effective in their

work lives and their ability to experience work engagement. As a result, it is very important for counselors to have strong psychological capital as well as having effective counselor characteristics in order to experience subjective well-being at work (work engagement).

*Effective Counselor Characteristics and Professional Quality of Life: Discussion on the Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout*

The first direct effect that can be examined regarding the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and the dimensions of professional quality of life, compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue and burnout, is the effect of effective counselor characteristics on psychological capital. As discussed in the previous section, psychological counselors who possess the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance their clients' psychological capital also serve as effective models throughout the counseling process (Egan, 2011). In doing so, they not only contribute to the effectiveness of the helping process but also experience growth alongside their clients. These contributions emphasize how the characteristics of an effective counselor strengthen the psychological structures and psychological capital of the counselors themselves (Hernández et al., 2007).

Another direct effect that can be examined regarding the models established within the scope of the research is the effect of effective counselor characteristics on professional quality of life. Accordingly, effective counselor characteristics positively predicted compassion satisfaction and negatively predicted compassion fatigue and burnout, which are sub-dimensions of professional quality of life. More clearly, having effective counselor characteristics can not only be supportive for counselors to experience compassion satisfaction in their professional lives, but also prevent them from experiencing negative emotions and situations such as compassion fatigue and burnout. Although there is no research in the literature directly addressing the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and professional quality of life, it is seen that there are studies that indirectly support the results obtained in this study. For example, in a study conducted by Ekşi et al. (2015), it was determined that there was a positive relationship between counselors' listening skills and their compassion satisfaction. In another study conducted by Özabacı et al. (2004), it is emphasized that the ideal characteristics of counselors are important in coping with and protecting from burnout. Similarly, the results of the study conducted by Thompson et al. (2014) revealed that individuals working in the field of mental health using appropriate coping strategies, having self-awareness, and experiencing compassion satisfaction in their professional life have a negative effect on compassion fatigue and burnout.

While counselors are vulnerable to experiencing negative outcomes such as burnout and compassion fatigue, as they provide help and are indirectly exposed to traumatic experiences in their professional lives, they can also experience compassion satisfaction as a result of their role in helping others (Stamm, 2010). On the other hand, effective counselors are considered to be energetic individuals who have the ability to cope with stress, have high self-awareness, are psychologically healthy and take actions to protect their health (Corey, 2008; Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). In addition, effective counselors can provide effective help during the counseling process and in this direction, they can experience positive states such as being inspired by their work and finding meaning in their work (McLeod, 2009). In conclusion, the characteristics possessed by effective counselors not only help prevent negative experiences such as burnout and compassion fatigue in professional life but also play a supportive role in fostering positive experiences such as compassion satisfaction. These characteristics enable the counselors to maintain their emotional well-being and to experience compassion satisfaction, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the psychological counseling process and facilitating a mutual positive cycle. As counselors attain personal and professional satisfaction and balance, they provide more effective support to their clients. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of the counseling process, strengthens the sense of satisfaction for both the counselor and the client, and enables long-term, sustainable development.

Another direct effect that can be addressed within the scope of the research is the effect of psychological capital on professional quality of life. Accordingly, psychological capital has a negative effect on burnout and compassion fatigue among the elements that make up the professional quality of life of counselors, and a positive effect on compassion satisfaction. In the related literature research results showing that psychological capital is supportive of compassion satisfaction (Çakmak & Arabacı, 2017; Erkuş & Fındıklı, 2013) and preventive of compassion fatigue (Bao & Taliaferro, 2015) and burnout (Ocak & Güler, 2017; Tösten et al., 2017) support the findings obtained in this study. The concept of professional quality of life emphasizes that individuals exist not only physically but also cognitively, socially and psychologically in the work environment (Coşkun et al., 2015). At this point, having a strong psychological capital can positively affect employees' professional quality of life. In this context, having strong psychological capital can positively influence employees' professional quality of life. Burnout and compassion fatigue, as negative dimensions of professional quality of life, occur when individuals struggle to cope with work-related stress due to insufficient personal and environmental resources, resulting in decreased job effectiveness (Stamm, 2010). Psychological capital, on the other hand, is related to individuals' having positive thoughts and beliefs that they can achieve a certain performance and success, having the necessary energy to achieve a goal and their ability to cope with and recover from the difficulties they encounter (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Within the framework of these explanations, it can be said that psychological capital is among the personal resources that help employees cope with negative situations such as burnout and compassion fatigue, and thus plays a protective role against such negativities and a supportive role in experiencing positive situations such as compassion satisfaction.

Finally, the tested hypothetical models regarding the mediating role of psychological capital were supported, and the mediating effects of psychological capital in the relationship between effective counselor characteristics and all dimensions of professional quality of life were found to be significant. First, it was found that psychological capital plays a partial mediating role in the effect of effective counselor characteristics on the subdimension of professional quality of life, namely, compassion satisfaction. Based on these results, it can be said that it is crucial for counselors to possess the characteristics that make them effective and invest in their psychological capital in order to experience compassion satisfaction. When examining the effects of effective counselor characteristics on both compassion fatigue and burnout levels, the results show that psychological capital plays a full mediating role in both cases. These result reveals that it is very important for counselors to invest in their psychological capital, namely hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience in order to avoid burnout and compassion fatigue in their professional lives. Both compassion fatigue and burnout, which constitute the negative dimensions of professional quality of life, are essentially adverse conditions that result in the inability to perform the job effectively, stemming from an individual's inability to cope with the demands of the job or work-related stress. It is believed that the effective counselor characteristics play a significant role in preventing these negative conditions for counselors. In this context, certain studies have demonstrated that specific characteristics, such as employees' perception of professionalism (Jang et al., 2016), their helping perception and ability (Mohammadi et al., 2017), and their self-awareness (Killian, 2008), function as preventative factors in the experience of compassion fatigue and burnout. These characteristics also encompass the characteristics that effective counselors should possess. Therefore, it is an expected result that effective counselors, who are expected to be energetic, mentally healthy and have high self-awareness, will experience burnout and compassion fatigue less. Compassion satisfaction, which is another sub-dimension of professional quality of life, reflects a positive aspect of work for counselors, related to the fulfillment and satisfaction derived from doing their job well and being in a helping role (Stamm, 2010). In this context, it is expected that effective counselors who have the necessary equipment to perform their jobs in the best way experience compassion satisfaction in their professional lives. Similarly, it is believed that effective counselor characteristics can serve as a resource that strengthens counselors' psychological capital. Therefore, counselors with high psychological capital are expected to cope with stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue encountered in their professional lives (Bao & Taliaferro, 2015; Javaheri, 2017) as

well as experience compassion satisfaction (Bozgeyikli, 2012; Radeka & Hicks, 2018). In conclusion, it is evident that for counselors to protect themselves from negative experiences like compassion fatigue and burnout, which undermine their professional quality of life, and to experience greater compassion satisfaction in their work, it is crucial for them to invest in their personal development to become more effective and efficient in their roles. Additionally, engaging in activities that strengthen their psychological capital—such as enhancing self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience—plays a vital role. Such investments are not only beneficial for the counselors' personal and professional growth but also contribute to their ability to perform in a healthier, more balanced way within their work environment.

### **Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions**

In this study, the effects of effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital on counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life were examined. According to the research results, both effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital have a positive impact on counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and support them to experience compassion satisfaction, while play a preventive role in preventing them from experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue. In addition, psychological capital has a mediating role in all of the relationships between effective counselor characteristics and work life experiences (work engagement, compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue). While psychological capital plays a determinant role in the effect of effective counselor characteristics on compassion fatigue and burnout, it plays a reinforcing role in the effect of effective counselor characteristics on subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and compassion satisfaction.

In addition to the results obtained in the research, this study has some limitations. The first one is that all the data used in the study were collected through quantitative scales. Effective counselor characteristics and psychological capital are developable traits that play a role in influencing the positive experiences of counselors in their work life and their engagement to their work. In this context, conducting similar studies not only through quantitative methods but also qualitative research is important for a deeper understanding of the effects of these concepts. In recent years, it has been emphasized that qualitative studies exploring the organizational challenges faced by mental health professionals, particularly regarding their working conditions, and how these challenges impact their well-being, can offer valuable insights to improve the professional quality of life and well-being of those who provide help (Mamacı, 2021). In this context, it is thought that qualitative research on how counselors develop and can develop effective counselor characteristics and their effects on overcoming the difficulties they experience is important both in terms of eliminating the problems experienced in the field and increasing the quality of service areas.

Another limitation of the study is that the subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life of counselors were examined specifically within the framework of personal resources, focusing solely on psychological capital. Therefore in future studies, it is suggested that counselors' subjective well-being at work (work engagement) and professional quality of life should be examined in terms of different personal resources as well as external resources such as the characteristics of the work environment, organizational structure and climate and environmental conditions. Thus, the reflections of both internal and external power resources in the work environment can be evaluated more comprehensively and holistically. As a matter of fact, positive and negative experiences of mental health professionals in their work life such as compassion fatigue, burnout and well-being are influenced by various personal resources such as coping strategies, mindfulness, self-care, and mental health (Koller & Hicks, 2016; Sharifian, 2019; Thompson et al., 2014). In addition, organizational factors such as safe working conditions, adequate compensation, compatibility of organizational values with family and social values, workload, caseload, types of leadership, justice and values also play an important role in shaping positive and negative experiences at work (Green et al., 2014; Zengin & Bayram, 2023). Therefore, conducting comparative studies that comprehensively examine internal and external power resources from multiple perspectives can make valuable

contributions in predicting the positive (subjective well-being at work, compassion satisfaction, etc.) and negative experiences (burnout, compassion fatigue, etc.) of mental health professionals at work. It is thought that the findings of such studies will make significant contributions to the development of empowering strategies at both individual and organizational levels in the field of mental health, increasing employee well-being, improving service quality and reducing burnout. In addition, the results of this study are limited to the Turkish sample. Considering the differences between Türkiye and other countries in terms of the training received by counselors, working conditions, working hours, and supervision processes (Aladağ & Kemer, 2016; Falender et al., 2021; Meydan, 2014), it is thought that conducting cross-cultural comparison studies will make important contributions to the literature in terms of generalisability of the results.

Another limitation that can be addressed within the scope of the study is that the study was conducted only on counselors. Considering the common professional competencies (to have knowledge about the basic concepts of psychology, to have knowledge about the basic theories, principles and techniques of psychology, to be able to integrate the concepts, theories, principles and techniques into individual and group counseling practices etc.) (Turkish Qualifications Database, 2025a, 2025b; Türk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Derneği, 2022; Vocational Qualifications Authority, 2017); common ethical values (confidentiality, honesty, etc.) (ACA, 2014; American Psychological Association [APA], 2017; American Mental Health Counselors Association [AMHCA], 2020) and common risks (secondary traumatization, etc.) (Zara & İçöz, 2015) that may influence the work-life experiences of mental health professionals, the findings of this study are deemed significant not only for counselors but also for other mental health practitioners. For this reason, it is thought that conducting comparative studies with different professionals working in the field of mental health (psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, clinical psychologists and psychological counselors, etc.) will contribute to both those who provide help and those who receive help in mental health services.

The findings of this research, along with the studies mentioned earlier, hold significant value for mental health professionals, counselors, counselor candidates, counseling educators, as well as the individuals they serve, such as students, clients, families, and the broader organizations they are part of. Today, counselors serve in various fields such as educational institutions and rehabilitation centers affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, public and private institutions, psychological counseling centers, and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, the work engagement, compassion satisfaction and psychological capital of counselors enhance the quality of their work, thereby contributing to providing more effective support to clients receiving services from various institutions. Similarly, effective counseling characteristics also help clients benefit more from counseling services, and contribute to the counseling process conducting effectively. When the factors explained in detail before, such as the variety of services provided by counselors and the requirements of their training, and the results obtained in this study as a whole, it can be said that it is an inevitable necessity for counselors to invest in themselves professionally and psychologically. At this point, it can be suggested that they participate in in-service trainings that will increase both their qualifications as effective counselors and their psychological capital. It is thought that supporting these trainings at the level of administrators and planning in-service training programs in this context will also support this investment. Additionally, it is recommended that undergraduate programs in Psychological Counseling and Guidance incorporate and expand courses such as Positive Psychology, Organizational Psychology, and Positive Psychology Practices in Schools. These courses should focus on enhancing psychological capital (including self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) and complement existing theoretical and applied courses (such as Psychological Counseling Principles and Techniques, Psychological Counseling Skills, Individual Counseling Practice, and Group Counseling Practice) that provide hands-on counseling experience under supervision.

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