

Work-Specific Characteristics and Their Roles in Guidance Counselors' Compassion Satisfaction, and Compassion Fatigue: A Structural Equation Model

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of work-specific characteristics on the emotional well-being of guidance counselors, particularly compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, within the context of increasing mental health demands in educational settings in Mindanao. The study aimed to analyze the effects of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion on compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, involving 119 licensed guidance counselors selected through a proportionate stratified sampling procedure. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire and the ProQOL v5, with established validity and reliability. Analyses included descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, ANOVA, and SEM. Interpersonal skills and genuineness significantly and positively predicted compassion satisfaction, while a non-judgmental attitude negatively predicted it. No work-specific characteristics significantly predicted compassion fatigue. Mediation and interaction analyses indicated that compassion fatigue neither mediated nor moderated the relationships among variables. Burnout significantly and negatively predicted compassion satisfaction, whereas secondary traumatic stress was non-significant. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) further revealed that work-specific characteristics exert a strong, significant direct effect on compassion satisfaction ($\beta = 1.219, p < .001$), making it the primary predictor in the model. In contrast, compassion fatigue did not significantly predict compassion satisfaction nor influence work-specific characteristics, indicating no structural or mediating role within the model. Work-specific characteristics primarily enhance professional fulfillment rather than reduce fatigue, which appears influenced by external factors. While guidance counselors report high satisfaction, moderate fatigue highlights the need for institutional support. The inadequate model fit underscores the need for more comprehensive frameworks integrating both individual and contextual determinants of guidance counselor well-being.

Keywords: Work-Specific Characteristics, Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue, Guidance Counselors, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of mental health concerns among students has intensified the demand for effective school-based counseling services worldwide. Studies have documented rising levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress among children and adolescents, underscoring schools as critical contexts for early psychological intervention and support (Loades et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2021). In the Philippine educational system, guidance and counseling services are formally recognized as essential components of student support that promote holistic development and well-being (Commission on Higher Education, 2019). However, despite this recognition, many educational institutions continue to experience a shortage of qualified guidance counselors, resulting in high counselor-to-student ratios and escalating professional demands. This condition is likewise evident across Philippine educational settings, where guidance counselors frequently assume multiple roles, ranging from academic advising to psychosocial interventions, while serving increasingly diverse student

populations (American School Counselor Association, 2019; Hapsyah & Herdi, 2019).

Consequently, a mismatch persists between the growing mental health needs of students and the institutional capacity to adequately support both learners and the professionals tasked to assist them. These challenges are particularly salient in resource-constrained and socio-culturally diverse contexts, where limited guidance counselor availability and institutional support may further shape professional experiences (Dionaldo, 2024; Gallardo & Chavez, 2022). While such conditions are likely present in regions such as Mindanao, empirical investigations of guidance counselors' well-being remain limited, and existing studies indicate that their experiences have received comparatively little scholarly attention in the Philippine context. Professional quality of life (ProQoL) provides a conceptual lens for examining the well-being of helping professionals by capturing both the positive and negative emotional consequences of helping work (Stamm, 2010). It encompasses compassion satisfaction, the fulfillment derived from helping others, and compassion fatigue, an emotional exhaustion associated with prolonged exposure to others' distress (Figley, 2018; Stamm, 2010).

For guidance counselors, whose roles involve sustained engagement with students' academic, personal, and psychosocial concerns, professional practice may simultaneously offer meaning and emotional strain. As such, professional quality of life constitutes a critical outcome in sustaining effective and responsive school-based counseling services. Guidance counselors' professional quality of life is shaped not only by external work demands but also by internal competencies and relational characteristics that influence their engagement in helping roles. Grounded in person-centered theory, effective counseling relationships are characterized by empathic understanding, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard (Joseph & Murphy, 2019). Within school counseling contexts, these qualities are manifested through work-specific characteristics such as empathic understanding, genuineness, and a non-judgmental attitude.

Moreover, interpersonal skills and self-compassion function as essential psychological resources that facilitate emotional regulation, adaptive coping, and resilience in the face of professional demands (Neff & Germer, 2018; Kotera et al., 2021). Collectively, these variables are posited to influence guidance counselors' professional quality of life by shaping their experiences of both compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. Despite the expanding body of literature on professional quality of life, existing research has predominantly emphasized external workplace conditions, including workload, organizational climate, and job-related stress (Sinclair et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). In contrast, comparatively limited attention has been paid to the roles of internal competencies and relational dynamics, particularly within school-based counseling contexts.

In the Philippine setting, scholarly work has largely focused on program implementation and service delivery, with relatively less attention to the psychological well-being of guidance counselors (Tan, 2021). This tendency is further evident in regions such as Mindanao, where guidance counselors operate in complex, demanding environments yet remain underrepresented in empirical inquiry. Without a more comprehensive understanding of how guidance counselors' competencies interact with their professional well-being, there is a heightened risk of burnout, diminished counseling effectiveness, and compromised student support services. These conditions underscore the importance of a context-sensitive investigation into the factors that shape guidance counselors' professional quality of life.

Given the limited focus on these variables, the present study examines the structural relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). By analyzing both direct and indirect pathways among compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, the study seeks to identify a best-fit model that explains how guidance counselors' competencies influence their professional well-being. This study contributes to the helping profession by generating evidence-based insights that inform the development of targeted support interventions, strengthen guidance counselor resilience, and enhance institutional practices in educational settings in Mindanao. Ultimately, the study aims to support the well-being of guidance counselors while promoting the sustainability and effectiveness of counseling services, thereby fostering improved psychosocial outcomes for the students they serve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Guidance Counseling

Guidance counseling has undergone a substantial transformation from its traditional focus on vocational placement and educational guidance into a comprehensive developmental profession that addresses students' academic, career, personal, social, and psychological well-being. This transformation reflects broader changes in educational systems, where schools are increasingly expected to serve not only as centers of academic learning but also as environments that promote mental health, resilience, and holistic student development. International organizations such as UNESCO emphasize that school guidance programs have become integral to fostering students' lifelong learning, psychosocial adjustment, career readiness, and overall well-being. Consequently, guidance counselors now occupy a strategic position within educational institutions, serving as mental health advocates, developmental facilitators, crisis responders, and collaborators with teachers, administrators, families, and community agencies.

The expanding scope of guidance counseling has been accompanied by increasing professional complexity. Contemporary guidance counselors are expected to provide preventive and developmental interventions while simultaneously responding to diverse concerns, including anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, behavioral difficulties, family conflict, academic stress, and career uncertainty. These responsibilities require counselors to maintain high levels of empathic engagement, ethical decision-making, interpersonal competence, and emotional regulation while ensuring culturally responsive and evidence-based practice (Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Elliott et al., 2023a). Unlike many educational professionals whose responsibilities focus primarily on instruction or administration, guidance counselors engage continuously in emotionally intensive interactions that require sustained psychological investment. As a result, counseling effectiveness depends not only on technical knowledge and professional competence but also on counselors' capacity to preserve their own psychological well-being while supporting others.

Within the Philippine context, the professionalization of guidance counseling has been strengthened through the enactment of the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2000 or the Republic Act No. 9258, which institutionalized licensure, professional standards, and ethical practice. Nevertheless, empirical studies suggest that Philippine guidance counselors continue to encounter substantial organizational challenges that affect the delivery of counseling services. Limited staffing, increasing student-to-counselor ratios, insufficient institutional resources, expanding administrative responsibilities, and growing mental health concerns among students frequently constrain counselors' ability to provide comprehensive developmental services (Jimenez et al., 2018; Cordova Jr. et al., 2023; Department of Education, 2025). These structural limitations indicate that counselor effectiveness cannot be explained solely by institutional provisions or professional qualifications. Rather, effective counseling practice depends on counselors' ability to mobilize personal and professional resources while responding to increasingly complex educational and psychosocial demands.

Recent literature has consequently shifted attention from counselor competence alone toward counselors' professional quality of life. This shift reflects growing recognition that the effectiveness and sustainability of counseling practice are influenced not only by organizational environments but also by counselors' psychological functioning. Research consistently demonstrates that counselors who experience positive occupational well-being are more likely to establish effective therapeutic relationships, demonstrate greater professional engagement, and maintain ethical and competent practice (Stamm, 2010; Crego et al., 2022b; Özden & Kaya, 2025). Conversely, prolonged occupational stress has been associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced counseling effectiveness, impaired decision-making, and increased intentions to leave the profession (Mullen, 2018; Kapoor, 2022). These findings suggest that counselor well-being represents not merely an individual concern but an essential component of service quality within educational institutions.

Professional quality of life has therefore emerged as a central framework for understanding counselors' occupational experiences. According to Stamm's (2010) Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) model, helping professionals simultaneously experience positive and negative consequences of caring for others. Compassion satisfaction reflects the fulfillment, accomplishment, and meaning derived from helping clients, whereas

compassion fatigue encompasses burnout and secondary traumatic stress resulting from prolonged exposure to others' suffering. Rather than existing as mutually exclusive conditions, these dimensions frequently coexist, enabling counselors to derive considerable professional satisfaction while simultaneously experiencing significant emotional strain. This multidimensional perspective challenges earlier assumptions that occupational well-being could be understood solely in terms of the absence of stress or burnout.

Empirical evidence generally supports the proposition that guidance counselors derive substantial meaning from their professional roles. Studies consistently report that opportunities to facilitate students' personal growth, witness positive behavioral change, and contribute to educational success strengthen counselors' professional identity and increase compassion satisfaction (Saleem & Hawamdeh, 2022; Klimenko et al., 2024; Özden & Kaya, 2025). Similarly, counselors who perceive themselves as professionally competent and psychologically resilient tend to report greater occupational fulfillment, stronger organizational commitment, and higher levels of psychological well-being (Galiana et al., 2021; Kotera et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the view that helping relationships provide significant psychological rewards that can sustain long-term professional engagement.

However, the literature also reveals a more complex and less uniform picture of counselors' occupational experiences. Although counseling offers meaningful opportunities for professional fulfillment, sustained exposure to clients' emotional distress may simultaneously contribute to compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 1995; Stamm, 2010; Mullen, 2018; Singh et al., 2020a; Fitriana & Nurochim, 2024). High caseloads, repeated exposure to traumatic experiences, limited institutional support, and expanding administrative demands have been consistently associated with increased psychological distress among helping professionals (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Liang & Yin, 2025b). These findings suggest that the psychological rewards of helping do not immunize counselors against occupational stress; instead, professional quality of life reflects an ongoing balance between resource investment and emotional demands.

An important pattern emerging from recent scholarship is the inconsistency in explaining why counselors exposed to similar occupational conditions report markedly different levels of professional well-being. Some studies identify empathic understanding, genuineness, interpersonal competence, and authenticity as protective resources that enhance resilience, counseling effectiveness, and compassion satisfaction (Holyoak et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2025; Schwartz et al., 2025). In contrast, other investigations demonstrate that these same characteristics intensify emotional labor, increase empathic distress, and elevate susceptibility to compassion fatigue because they require sustained emotional investment (Kapoor, 2022; De Jong et al., 2024; Fischer, Perlman, & Cáceres-Videla, 2024). These apparently contradictory findings indicate that counselor characteristics cannot simply be classified as either beneficial or detrimental. Rather, their influence appears contingent upon interactions among individual psychological resources, workplace conditions, and broader organizational support systems.

Contemporary research increasingly supports this interactionist perspective. Evidence suggests that self-compassion, emotional regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and adaptive coping strategies function as regulatory mechanisms that influence whether empathic engagement culminates in compassion satisfaction or compassion fatigue (Neff & Germer, 2018; Crego et al., 2022a; Kotera et al., 2022; Nas et al., 2025a). Likewise, organizational factors such as supportive supervision, manageable workloads, collaborative professional cultures, and opportunities for continuing professional development have been shown to strengthen counselors' capacity to maintain professional well-being despite emotionally demanding work environments (Whittenbury et al., 2025; Malekiha et al., 2025). These findings collectively suggest that counselors' professional experiences emerge from the dynamic interaction of personal and contextual resources rather than from isolated individual characteristics or workplace conditions.

The growing complexity of these relationships has important implications for counseling research. Although existing studies have substantially advanced the understanding of counselor well-being, much of the literature continues to rely on regression and correlation analyses that examine counselor characteristics independently. Such approaches identify significant predictors of professional quality of life but provide limited insight into how multiple psychological resources interact simultaneously to influence occupational outcomes.

Consequently, the literature remains fragmented, offering only partial explanations for why guidance counselors working under comparable organizational conditions experience substantially different levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue.

Collectively, the literature demonstrates that contemporary guidance counseling is characterized by increasing professional complexity, requiring counselors to balance technical competence with sustained emotional engagement. Guidance counselors derive considerable professional fulfillment from facilitating students' growth and development; however, these same helping relationships expose them to significant psychological demands that may compromise their professional quality of life. Existing evidence consistently recognizes counselors' work-specific characteristics as central determinants of occupational functioning, yet the literature remains divided regarding whether these characteristics primarily function as protective resources or sources of emotional vulnerability. Rather than representing contradictory findings, recent scholarship suggests that counselor well-being is shaped by the interaction of personal psychological resources and organizational contexts. This evolving perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the present study, which examines how work-specific characteristics collectively influence compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors through an integrated Structural Equation Model.

Work-Specific Characteristics as Psychological Resources

The growing complexity of guidance counseling has shifted scholarly attention from counselors' technical competence toward the personal and relational resources that enable them to sustain effective helping relationships. While professional knowledge and counseling skills remain essential, increasing evidence suggests that counselors' psychological characteristics substantially influence both counseling effectiveness and occupational well-being. These characteristics, commonly conceptualized as work-specific, include empathetic understanding, genuineness, a non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion. Collectively, they shape how counselors perceive clients' experiences, establish therapeutic alliances, regulate emotional demands, and maintain professional functioning under increasingly challenging practice conditions (Haolah, 2018; Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Crego et al., 2022a). Rather than functioning independently, these characteristics interact as complementary psychological resources that influence counselors' professional quality of life.

Earlier counseling theories, particularly person-centered and humanistic approaches, conceptualized these characteristics primarily as therapeutic conditions that facilitate client growth (Rogers, 1957; Kolden et al., 2018). Contemporary research, however, extends this perspective by demonstrating that these same characteristics also shape counselors' occupational well-being. Consequently, recent scholarship increasingly examines work-specific characteristics not merely as determinants of counseling effectiveness but as psychological resources that influence whether helping professionals experience compassion satisfaction or compassion fatigue (Ranjouri et al., 2025; Özden & Kaya, 2025). This shift reflects broader developments in counseling psychology that emphasize the reciprocal relationship between counselor well-being and counseling effectiveness.

Empathic Understanding

Empathic understanding remains one of the most fundamental competencies in counseling because it enables counselors to understand clients' thoughts, emotions, and experiences from the clients' perspectives while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Extensive empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that empathy strengthens therapeutic alliance, increases client engagement, facilitates emotional disclosure, and improves counseling outcomes (Elliott et al., 2023a; Zhang et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2025). These findings explain why empathy has long been regarded as one of the strongest predictors of counseling effectiveness across diverse therapeutic settings.

Nevertheless, contemporary literature increasingly portrays empathy as a multidimensional construct with both adaptive and demanding consequences. Whereas cognitive empathy enables counselors to understand clients' experiences while preserving emotional distance, affective empathy may increase emotional involvement and empathic distress when counselors become excessively identified with clients' suffering (Mullen, 2018; Kapoor,

2022). Studies involving counselors, psychologists, nurses, and other helping professionals consistently indicate that prolonged empathic engagement may contribute to emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and burnout, particularly among professionals exposed to repeated trauma narratives (Singh et al., 2020a; Fitriana & Nurochim, 2024). These findings challenge the traditional assumption that greater empathy invariably leads to better professional outcomes.

Rather than representing contradictory evidence, these findings suggest that empathy functions as a dual-effect psychological resource whose influence depends on counselors' regulatory capacities. Recent mediation studies demonstrate that self-compassion, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and adaptive coping significantly reduce the negative consequences of empathic engagement by enabling counselors to process emotional experiences without becoming overwhelmed (Neff & Germer, 2018; Saidi et al., 2025; Nas et al., 2025a). Consequently, empathy should be understood not as an isolated predictor of counselor well-being but as one component of a broader psychological system through which emotional engagement may culminate in either professional fulfillment or occupational distress.

Genuineness

Genuineness, commonly conceptualized as authenticity or congruence, refers to the alignment between counselors' internal experiences and their professional interactions with clients. Humanistic counseling theory identifies genuineness as one of the core therapeutic conditions that foster trust, openness, and psychological safety (Kolden et al., 2018; Nienhuis, 2018). Recent empirical studies similarly associate counselor authenticity with stronger therapeutic alliance, greater client satisfaction, increased treatment engagement, and improved counseling outcomes (Holyoak et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2023b; Lu et al., 2020).

However, maintaining authenticity within emotionally demanding counseling environments requires sustained emotional awareness and psychological regulation. Contemporary literature indicates that counselors who consistently engage authentically with distressed clients may experience heightened emotional labor because genuine therapeutic presence requires continuous emotional investment (Behan, 2022; Fischer, Perlman, & Cáceres-Videla, 2024). Consequently, authenticity may simultaneously strengthen counseling relationships while increasing counselors' susceptibility to emotional exhaustion when adequate protective resources are unavailable.

Emerging evidence suggests that genuineness's influence depends largely on counselors' ability to regulate their emotional experiences. Self-compassion and emotional regulation appear to buffer the psychological costs of authentic engagement by allowing counselors to remain emotionally available without becoming depleted (Neff & Germer, 2018; Crego et al., 2022b). These findings indicate that genuineness functions not merely as a therapeutic skill but as a relational resource whose effectiveness depends upon interactions with broader psychological mechanisms.

Non-Judgmental Attitude

A non-judgmental attitude represents another essential characteristic of effective counseling because it enables counselors to accept clients' experiences without criticism, evaluation, or premature interpretation. Such acceptance promotes psychological safety, encourages emotional disclosure, and strengthens therapeutic alliance by allowing clients to explore sensitive experiences without fear of rejection (Weinstein et al., 2022; Twigger et al., 2024). Consequently, non-judgment has consistently been associated with greater client engagement, increased autonomy, and more favorable counseling outcomes (Kara, 2023; Tursi et al., 2021).

Despite these benefits, maintaining a genuinely non-judgmental stance requires considerable cognitive and emotional effort. Counselors must continuously monitor their own assumptions, regulate personal biases, and sustain mindful awareness throughout emotionally demanding counseling sessions. Research increasingly suggests that prolonged self-regulation may contribute to emotional fatigue and cognitive exhaustion, particularly within high-demand counseling environments characterized by large caseloads and complex client concerns (Branson et al., 2022; Mohd et al., 2023). These findings indicate that non-judgment is not merely an interpersonal disposition but also a psychologically demanding professional practice.

Recent studies further demonstrate that counselors' capacity to remain non-judgmental toward clients is closely associated with self-compassion and mindfulness. Professionals who demonstrate greater acceptance toward themselves appear better able to maintain acceptance toward clients without experiencing excessive emotional strain (Ondrejková & Halamová, 2022; Tekin et al., 2025). This evidence reinforces the proposition that non-judgment functions within an integrated system of psychological resources that collectively influence counselor well-being.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills encompass the communication, relational, and collaborative competencies that enable counselors to establish effective helping relationships. These competencies include active listening, emotional responsiveness, verbal and nonverbal communication, conflict resolution, and collaborative problem-solving. Because counseling outcomes depend heavily on the quality of counselor-client relationships, interpersonal competence has consistently emerged as one of the strongest predictors of therapeutic effectiveness (Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Serrano-Pintado et al., 2022).

Recent empirical research consistently demonstrates that counselors possessing stronger interpersonal skills establish more effective therapeutic alliances, improve client engagement, and facilitate more favorable counseling outcomes (Cooper et al., 2025; Schwartz et al., 2025). However, interpersonal competence also increases emotional investment, as highly engaged counselors often assume greater emotional responsibility for clients' experiences. Consequently, strong relational involvement may increase emotional labor and psychological vulnerability when counselors encounter repeated crises or emotionally demanding cases (De Jong et al., 2024; Sushmitha, 2025).

Rather than indicating that interpersonal competence is harmful, these findings emphasize the importance of balancing relational engagement with emotional regulation. Studies consistently report that supportive organizational environments, professional supervision, and self-compassion reduce the emotional costs associated with intensive interpersonal involvement (Malekiha et al., 2025). Thus, interpersonal competence contributes most effectively to professional well-being when supported by complementary psychological and organizational resources.

Self-Compassion

Among the work-specific characteristics examined in contemporary counseling research, self-compassion has emerged as the most consistent protective factor associated with counselors' professional quality of life. Conceptualized as responding to personal suffering with kindness, mindful awareness, and recognition of common humanity, self-compassion enables counselors to acknowledge occupational challenges without excessive self-criticism or emotional avoidance (Neff, 2022). Unlike empathy, which directs attention toward others' experiences, self-compassion regulates counselors' responses to their own emotional demands.

Across helping professions, self-compassion consistently predicts lower levels of burnout, compassion fatigue, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress while simultaneously enhancing resilience, psychological well-being, and compassion satisfaction (Ferrari et al., 2019; Crego et al., 2022b; Kotera et al., 2021; Özden & Kaya, 2025). Intervention studies further demonstrate that self-compassion training improves emotional regulation and reduces occupational stress, suggesting that self-compassion is not merely a stable personality characteristic but a developable professional competency (Finlay-Jones et al., 2022; Tóth-Király et al., 2022).

However, contemporary scholarship also cautions against viewing self-compassion as universally sufficient for protecting counselors from occupational stress. Its effectiveness appears moderated by organizational factors such as workload, institutional support, supervision, and workplace climate (Sinclair et al., 2021; Kotera et al., 2022). Accordingly, counselors practicing within highly demanding environments may continue to experience psychological strain despite possessing substantial personal resources. These findings highlight the importance of examining counselor well-being within ecological systems that integrate both individual and contextual influences.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of recent research is the recognition of self-compassion as a regulatory mechanism that explains how other work-specific characteristics influence professional quality of life. Structural and mediation studies increasingly identify self-compassion as a central pathway linking empathy, authenticity, interpersonal competence, and emotional regulation to compassion satisfaction while simultaneously reducing burnout and compassion fatigue (Neff & Germer, 2018; Ranjouri et al., 2025). Rather than functioning as another independent predictor, self-compassion appears to integrate multiple psychological resources into a coherent explanation of counselors' professional functioning.

The literature consistently demonstrates that work-specific characteristics constitute the psychological resources through which guidance counselors establish effective helping relationships and sustain professional functioning. Empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion collectively strengthen counseling effectiveness by promoting therapeutic alliance, emotional responsiveness, and professional competence. However, contemporary research increasingly challenges the assumption that these characteristics are uniformly beneficial. Instead, they function as both protective resources and potential sources of emotional demand, depending on counselors' capacity for emotional regulation and the organizational environments in which counseling occurs. Among these characteristics, self-compassion consistently emerges as the principal regulatory resource that enables counselors to preserve empathic engagement while minimizing emotional exhaustion. Collectively, these findings suggest that counselor well-being is best understood through an integrated framework that recognizes the dynamic interaction among multiple psychological resources rather than isolated counselor characteristics. This synthesis provides the foundation for examining how these resources collectively shape professional quality of life in the succeeding section.

Professional Quality of Life Among Guidance Counselors

Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the occupational well-being of helping professionals because it recognizes that caregiving simultaneously generates psychological rewards and emotional costs (Stamm, 2010). In guidance counseling, professional quality of life refers to counselors' overall psychological experience of helping students navigate academic, personal, social, and career-related challenges. Unlike traditional occupational well-being models that emphasize either job satisfaction or occupational stress, the ProQOL framework conceptualizes professional well-being as the dynamic interaction between positive and negative consequences of helping. This perspective acknowledges that counselors may derive profound meaning from facilitating students' development while concurrently experiencing emotional exhaustion resulting from sustained exposure to clients' distress (Figley, 1995; Stamm, 2010).

The multidimensional nature of professional quality of life has become increasingly relevant as educational institutions confront growing mental health concerns among students. Guidance counselors are expected to provide preventive, developmental, and crisis interventions while responding to increasingly complex psychosocial concerns, including anxiety, depression, trauma, behavioral difficulties, grief, family conflict, and suicide risk (UNESCO, 2021; Department of Education, 2025). These expanding professional demands require counselors to invest considerable emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal resources over extended periods. Consequently, understanding counselors' professional quality of life has become essential not only for promoting counselor well-being but also for ensuring the effectiveness, sustainability, and ethical quality of counseling services.

Recent scholarship increasingly challenges earlier assumptions that professional quality of life is determined primarily by organizational conditions. Although workload, institutional support, role ambiguity, and administrative demands undoubtedly influence occupational well-being, contemporary evidence consistently demonstrates that counselors' internal psychological resources substantially shape their responses to these environmental demands (Crego et al., 2022b; Kotera et al., 2021; Özden & Kaya, 2025). This interactionist perspective aligns with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which proposes that individuals' ability to preserve and replenish personal resources determines their capacity to adapt successfully to occupational stress. Consequently, professional quality of life is increasingly conceptualized as the product of

continuous interactions between individual psychological resources and workplace environments rather than the direct consequence of occupational demands alone.

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction represents the positive dimension of professional quality of life and refers to the fulfillment, accomplishment, and meaning derived from helping others (Stamm, 2010). For guidance counselors, compassion satisfaction arises from meaningful therapeutic relationships, successful student outcomes, and the perception that their professional efforts contribute positively to students' personal, academic, and psychosocial development. These experiences reinforce professional identity, strengthen occupational commitment, and promote sustained engagement in counseling practice.

Across helping professions, empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that compassion satisfaction is associated with higher psychological well-being, stronger professional identity, increased organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Galiana et al., 2021; Saleem & Hawamdeh, 2022; Klimenko et al., 2024). Counselors reporting high compassion satisfaction generally exhibit greater resilience, counseling self-efficacy, optimism, and emotional regulation, suggesting that professional fulfillment is closely associated with counselors' internal psychological resources (Crego et al., 2022b; Özden & Kaya, 2025). Similarly, supportive supervision, collaborative workplace cultures, continuing professional development, and manageable workloads consistently strengthen counselors' perceptions of competence and professional accomplishment.

However, recent literature cautions against assuming that helping others inevitably results in compassion satisfaction. Studies increasingly report considerable variability among professionals working under comparable organizational conditions (Xie et al., 2021; Jalan, 2023). Heavy caseloads, increased administrative responsibilities, inadequate institutional support, and repeated exposure to emotionally demanding cases may substantially diminish counselors' capacity to derive fulfillment from their work, despite their high professional competence (Bonganciso et al., 2022). These findings suggest that compassion satisfaction is neither automatic nor permanent, but rather fluctuates with the balance between occupational demands and available psychological and organizational resources.

More importantly, recent evidence suggests that compassion satisfaction is not simply a positive emotional outcome but reflects counselors' ability to transform emotionally demanding experiences into meaningful professional growth. Studies examining emotional regulation, resilience, and self-compassion consistently indicate that counselors who effectively manage occupational stress are more likely to sustain compassion satisfaction despite continuous exposure to emotionally demanding work (Quaglia et al., 2021; Kotera et al., 2022). Thus, compassion satisfaction should be understood as an adaptive occupational outcome resulting from effective resource management rather than merely the pleasurable consequence of helping others.

Compassion Fatigue

In contrast to compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue represents the cumulative emotional consequences of sustained empathic engagement with clients experiencing distress (Figley, 1995). It has traditionally been described as the "cost of caring," reflecting counselors' psychological responses to repeated exposure to others' trauma, suffering, and emotional pain. Within educational settings, guidance counselors frequently support students experiencing psychological crises, abuse, grief, academic failure, family disruption, and mental health disorders, placing them at elevated risk for compassion fatigue.

Early conceptualizations viewed compassion fatigue as an inevitable occupational hazard among helping professionals. However, more recent scholarship presents a considerably more nuanced perspective. Although repeated exposure to clients' emotional suffering undoubtedly increases counselors' vulnerability to psychological distress, empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that compassion fatigue varies substantially among professionals working under similar conditions (Singh et al., 2020a; Fitriana & Nurochim, 2024). These differences suggest that compassion fatigue is influenced not only by emotional exposure but also by counselors' psychological resources and organizational environments.

Empathy has emerged as one of the principal mechanisms underlying compassion fatigue. Excessive emotional identification with clients may intensify empathic distress and emotional exhaustion, particularly when counselors lack opportunities for psychological recovery (Kapoor, 2022; Mullen, 2018). Nevertheless, empathy itself is not inherently detrimental. Rather, studies consistently demonstrate that self-compassion, mindfulness, resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptive coping strategies significantly reduce the negative consequences of sustained empathic engagement (Neff & Germer, 2018; Li, 2025; Saidi et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the proposition that compassion fatigue develops through interactions among emotional demands, personal coping resources, and workplace conditions rather than through emotional exposure alone.

Consequently, contemporary researchers increasingly conceptualize compassion fatigue as a dynamic occupational process rather than a fixed psychological condition. This perspective shifts scholarly attention away from identifying isolated predictors toward understanding how counselors regulate emotional demands over time. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive explanation for the substantial variation observed among counselors' professional experiences despite comparable occupational environments.

Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress as Dimensions of Compassion Fatigue

According to Stamm's (2010) Professional Quality of Life framework, compassion fatigue comprises two related yet conceptually distinct dimensions: burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS). Although frequently examined independently, contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes their interconnected nature.

Burnout develops gradually through chronic occupational stress and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced professional accomplishment, and diminished occupational motivation (Maslach et al., 2001). Research consistently identifies excessive workload, role ambiguity, administrative burden, organizational conflict, and limited institutional support as significant contributors to counselors' burnout (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Liang & Yin, 2025b). At the same time, counselors' internal resources substantially influence their vulnerability to these occupational stressors. Self-compassion, optimism, resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptive coping consistently reduce burnout by enabling counselors to replenish depleted psychological resources (Crego et al., 2022c; Mackintosh & Power, 2018; Kotera et al., 2022).

Secondary traumatic stress differs from burnout in that it results specifically from indirect exposure to clients' traumatic experiences (Figley, 1995). Guidance counselors who repeatedly encounter disclosures of abuse, violence, suicide, family conflict, and other traumatic experiences may develop symptoms resembling post-traumatic stress disorder, including intrusive thoughts, avoidance behaviors, emotional numbing, and physiological arousal (Park et al., 2025; Durak et al., 2025). Nevertheless, recent literature consistently demonstrates that secondary traumatic stress is moderated by supportive supervision, trauma-informed training, organizational support, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion (Hong & Wang, 2024; Whittenbury et al., 2025). Consequently, trauma exposure alone provides only a partial explanation for counselors' psychological responses.

Collectively, burnout and secondary traumatic stress illustrate that professional quality of life reflects a continuous balance between occupational demands and available psychological resources. Rather than being the inevitable consequences of counseling work, both conditions develop through ongoing interactions among counselors' personal characteristics, workplace environments, and professional support systems.

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that professional quality of life encompasses both the rewarding and psychologically demanding aspects of guidance counseling. Compassion satisfaction reflects counselors' capacity to derive meaning, fulfillment, and professional accomplishment from helping students, whereas compassion fatigue—including burnout and secondary traumatic stress—represents the emotional costs associated with sustained therapeutic engagement. Importantly, contemporary research no longer views these dimensions as independent or mutually exclusive. Rather, they are increasingly conceptualized as interconnected outcomes influenced by the dynamic interaction of counselors' work-specific characteristics, psychological resources, and organizational environments. This shift from linear to multidimensional explanations provides the theoretical foundation for investigating how empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion collectively shape professional quality of life among guidance

counselors. These insights naturally lead to the succeeding discussion on the relationships between work-specific characteristics and professional quality of life, which serves as the conceptual basis for the proposed Structural Equation Model.

Relationship Between Work-Specific Characteristics and Professional Quality of Life

The relationship between work-specific characteristics and professional quality of life has become a central concern in counseling psychology because it provides insight into why helping professionals exposed to comparable occupational demands often experience markedly different psychological outcomes. Although guidance counselors frequently work within similar organizational environments and perform comparable professional responsibilities, they differ considerably in their levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue. These variations suggest that professional quality of life cannot be explained solely by external work conditions but must also be understood through the interaction of counselors' internal psychological resources and occupational environments (Stamm, 2010; Hobfoll, 1989). Consequently, recent scholarship increasingly conceptualizes professional quality of life as the product of dynamic interactions among counselors' work-specific characteristics rather than the direct outcome of isolated personal or organizational factors.

Earlier investigations primarily examined counselor characteristics as independent predictors of occupational well-being. Regression-based studies consistently reported that empathic understanding, interpersonal competence, genuineness, and self-compassion positively predicted counseling effectiveness, job satisfaction, and professional fulfillment (Yildirim, 2021; Levkovich & Ricon, 2020; Crego et al., 2022a). These findings supported the longstanding assumption that counselors possessing stronger therapeutic competencies were more likely to experience positive professional outcomes because effective helping relationships reinforce counselors' sense of competence, purpose, and professional identity. However, while these studies established important direct associations, they provided limited explanation of the mechanisms through which counselor characteristics influence professional quality of life or why counselors possessing similar competencies frequently report substantially different occupational experiences.

Recent literature presents a more nuanced understanding by demonstrating that work-specific characteristics simultaneously function as professional assets and occupational demands. Empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitudes, and interpersonal competence consistently strengthen therapeutic alliance, facilitate client engagement, and improve counseling outcomes (Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Elliott et al., 2023a; Cooper et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these same characteristics require continuous emotional availability, sustained cognitive attention, and prolonged interpersonal investment. Consequently, counselors who consistently demonstrate high levels of relational engagement may experience increased emotional labor, psychological exhaustion, and vulnerability to compassion fatigue when occupational demands exceed available psychological resources (Kapoor, 2022; De Jong et al., 2024; Fischer Perlman & Cáceres-Videla, 2024). Rather than contradicting earlier findings, these observations suggest that counselor characteristics possess inherently dual functions: they simultaneously facilitate effective counseling while increasing emotional demands associated with helping work.

The paradoxical nature of these findings has prompted researchers to reconsider traditional linear explanations of counselor well-being. Instead of asking whether counselor characteristics are beneficial or detrimental, contemporary scholarship increasingly examines the conditions under which these characteristics contribute either to professional fulfillment or psychological distress. Emerging evidence consistently indicates that counselors' internal regulatory capacities—including self-compassion, emotional regulation, resilience, and mindfulness—determine how emotional demands are processed and managed (Neff & Germer, 2018; Kotera et al., 2022; Saidi et al., 2025). From this perspective, empathic engagement itself does not inevitably lead to compassion fatigue; rather, the psychological consequences of empathy depend on counselors' ability to replenish emotional resources while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. This interpretation aligns with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which proposes that occupational stress results from resource depletion rather than from exposure to demands alone.

Among the work-specific characteristics examined in recent counseling literature, self-compassion consistently emerges as the most influential regulatory mechanism linking counselor competencies to professional quality of life. Unlike empathy and interpersonal competence, which primarily facilitate counselors' relationships with clients, self-compassion regulates counselors' responses to their own emotional experiences. Numerous studies consistently demonstrate that self-compassion reduces burnout, compassion fatigue, and psychological distress while simultaneously enhancing resilience, professional fulfillment, and compassion satisfaction (Ferrari et al., 2019; Crego et al., 2022b; Özden & Kaya, 2025). More importantly, mediation studies suggest that self-compassion explains how empathy, authenticity, and interpersonal engagement influence occupational outcomes by reducing empathic distress and strengthening adaptive emotional regulation (Papadimitriou et al., 2023; Quaglia et al., 2021; Ranjouri et al., 2025). These findings indicate that self-compassion functions not merely as another predictor but as a central explanatory mechanism within counselors' professional experiences.

Beyond individual psychological resources, organizational conditions also play a significant role in shaping the relationship between work-specific characteristics and professional quality of life. Supportive supervision, manageable workloads, collaborative professional cultures, continuing professional development, and institutional recognition consistently strengthen counselors' ability to utilize their personal competencies effectively (Malekiha et al., 2025; Whittenbury et al., 2025). Conversely, excessive caseloads, role ambiguity, administrative burden, and insufficient organizational support may weaken the protective effects of counselors' personal resources, increasing vulnerability to burnout and compassion fatigue despite high levels of professional competence (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Liang & Yin, 2025b). These findings reinforce ecological perspectives, suggesting that counselor well-being emerges from reciprocal interactions between individual characteristics and organizational environments rather than either domain independently.

Another important development in contemporary scholarship concerns the recognition that work-specific characteristics rarely operate independently. Empirical evidence increasingly indicates that empathy, authenticity, interpersonal competence, non-judgmental attitudes, and self-compassion reinforce one another through interconnected psychological processes. For example, counselors possessing strong interpersonal competence often demonstrate greater empathic understanding and authenticity, while counselors with higher levels of self-compassion appear better able to maintain non-judgmental therapeutic relationships and regulate emotional responses to clients' distress (Neff, 2022; Tekin et al., 2025; Ranjouri et al., 2025). Such findings challenge traditional regression models that estimate the independent contribution of each predictor and instead support multidimensional frameworks that acknowledge reciprocal relationships among psychological resources.

Despite these conceptual advances, important limitations remain evident within the existing literature. Most studies continue to employ regression or simple mediation analyses that examine only a limited number of variables and assume relatively linear relationships among counselor characteristics and occupational outcomes. Although these approaches identify significant predictors of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, they provide a limited understanding of the simultaneous direct and indirect relationships among multiple latent constructs. Consequently, existing evidence remains fragmented, offering only partial explanations of the complex psychological processes underlying professional quality of life (Hair et al., 2021; Black et al., 2024). This methodological limitation has become increasingly apparent as counseling researchers recognize that counselors' occupational experiences emerge through interconnected systems of psychological resources rather than isolated predictors.

A further limitation concerns the underrepresentation of guidance counselors in educational settings, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Much of the available evidence originates from nursing, medicine, psychology, and other helping professions in Western contexts. Although these findings provide valuable theoretical insights, educational counseling differs substantially from clinical practice because counselors simultaneously perform developmental, preventive, consultative, and administrative roles while maintaining long-term relationships with students, teachers, parents, and institutional stakeholders (UNESCO, 2021; Cordova Jr. et al., 2023). Moreover, Philippine guidance counselors operate within educational systems characterized by increasing mental health concerns, large counselor-to-student ratios, expanding administrative responsibilities, and limited institutional resources (Department of Education, 2025). These contextual

characteristics suggest that the relationships among work-specific characteristics and professional quality of life may differ from those observed in healthcare or clinical counseling settings, thereby necessitating context-specific investigation.

Collectively, the literature indicates that professional quality of life cannot be adequately explained through isolated counselor characteristics or simple linear relationships. Rather, compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue emerge through the continuous interaction of counselors' psychological resources, emotional regulation, organizational environments, and occupational demands. Work-specific characteristics simultaneously enhance counseling effectiveness and increase emotional investment, whereas self-compassion and related regulatory mechanisms appear to determine whether these demands culminate in professional fulfillment or occupational distress. Such evidence supports a multidimensional conceptualization of counselor well-being and underscores the need for analytical approaches capable of examining multiple direct and indirect relationships within an integrated theoretical framework.

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that work-specific characteristics constitute interconnected psychological resources that shape guidance counselors' professional quality of life through complex and multidirectional processes. Empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal competence, and self-compassion collectively strengthen counseling effectiveness and promote compassion satisfaction; however, these same characteristics may simultaneously increase counselors' emotional vulnerability when sustained occupational demands exceed available psychological resources. Contemporary scholarship, therefore, moves beyond linear explanations toward an interactionist perspective in which counselor well-being is understood as the product of reciprocal relationships among personal characteristics, emotional regulation, organizational conditions, and professional demands. Despite this conceptual advancement, existing evidence remains fragmented because most studies rely on regression or simple mediation analyses and have been conducted primarily among healthcare professionals rather than guidance counselors in educational settings. These conceptual, methodological, and contextual limitations provide a strong rationale for employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the simultaneous direct and indirect relationships among work-specific characteristics and professional quality of life among guidance counselors in Mindanao.

Structural Equation Modeling

The increasing complexity of psychological and behavioral research has prompted a shift from traditional statistical approaches toward analytical techniques capable of examining multidimensional relationships among latent constructs. In counseling psychology, researchers increasingly recognize that professional functioning, psychological well-being, and occupational outcomes rarely result from isolated variables operating independently. Instead, these outcomes emerge through interconnected systems of personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors that influence one another simultaneously. Consequently, analytical methods capable of modeling these complex interactions have become essential for advancing theory and empirical research. Among these methods, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has emerged as one of the most robust and widely accepted approaches for examining multidimensional psychological phenomena (Hair et al., 2021; Kline, 2023).

Structural Equation Modeling integrates confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis within a single statistical framework, allowing researchers to evaluate both the measurement properties of latent constructs and the structural relationships among them simultaneously (Byrne, 2022; Hair et al., 2021). Unlike traditional regression techniques that treat observed variables as error-free indicators, SEM explicitly accounts for measurement error in model estimation, thereby improving the accuracy and validity of parameter estimates. This characteristic is particularly important in counseling research because constructs such as empathic understanding, genuineness, interpersonal skills, self-compassion, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue are inherently latent psychological variables measured through multiple indicators rather than directly observable behaviors.

The increasing adoption of SEM reflects broader methodological developments within behavioral science. Earlier counseling research relied heavily on descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to examine relationships among counselor characteristics and occupational outcomes. These methods have contributed substantially to identifying important predictors of counseling effectiveness and professional quality

of life; however, they assume relatively simple linear relationships among variables and evaluate each relationship independently. Consequently, regression analyses provide only partial explanations of counselor well-being because they cannot adequately account for the simultaneous interaction of multiple latent constructs or estimate the overall fit between theoretical models and empirical data.

Mediation analysis represented an important methodological advancement by allowing researchers to examine the mechanisms through which independent variables influence outcomes. Recent counseling studies have successfully used mediation models to demonstrate that self-compassion, resilience, emotional regulation, and coping strategies explain how counselor characteristics influence burnout, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue (Papadimitriou et al., 2023; Quaglia et al., 2021; Ranjouri et al., 2025). Although mediation analyses improve understanding of indirect relationships, they typically examine a limited number of pathways and assume relatively simple causal structures. Consequently, they provide only partial representations of the complex psychological systems underlying counselors' professional experiences. As counselor well-being is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional phenomenon involving numerous interacting variables, more comprehensive analytical approaches have become necessary.

Structural Equation Modeling addresses these methodological limitations by enabling researchers to estimate multiple direct and indirect relationships simultaneously while evaluating the adequacy of an entire theoretical model. Rather than testing isolated hypotheses independently, SEM assesses whether the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs collectively explain the observed data (Kline, 2023). This capability allows researchers to evaluate complex theoretical propositions involving reciprocal relationships, mediating mechanisms, and multiple outcome variables within a unified analytical framework. Furthermore, global goodness-of-fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), provide comprehensive evidence regarding the extent to which theoretical models represent empirical observations (Hair et al., 2021). These features distinguish SEM from traditional statistical approaches that evaluate individual parameter estimates without assessing the adequacy of the overall theoretical model.

The methodological advantages of SEM have led to its widespread application across counseling psychology, education, organizational behavior, and mental health research. Recent studies have employed SEM to investigate psychological well-being, resilience, counselor competence, emotional intelligence, occupational stress, and professional quality of life, consistently demonstrating that multidimensional structural models provide greater explanatory power than isolated regression analyses (Ranjouri et al., 2025; Özden & Kaya, 2025; Crego et al., 2022a). In particular, structural models examining helping professionals increasingly reveal that professional quality of life develops through interdependent psychological processes rather than simple direct relationships. These findings reinforce the growing consensus that counselor well-being is best understood through integrative theoretical frameworks capable of representing multiple simultaneous influences.

Despite these methodological advances, the application of SEM within guidance counseling research remains comparatively limited. Much of the existing literature continues to rely on descriptive, correlational, regression, or simple mediation designs that examine only selected relationships among counselor characteristics and occupational outcomes (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Bonganciso et al., 2022). While these investigations have identified significant predictors of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue, they offer limited insight into how multiple work-specific characteristics collectively influence counselors' professional quality of life. Furthermore, relatively few studies have developed comprehensive structural models involving guidance counselors working in educational institutions, particularly within developing countries such as the Philippines.

This methodological limitation is especially significant considering the evolving responsibilities of Philippine guidance counselors. Increasing student mental health concerns, expanding administrative functions, limited institutional resources, and high counselor-to-student ratios create professional environments characterized by multiple interacting demands rather than isolated occupational stressors (Department of Education, 2025; Cordova Jr. et al., 2023). Such complexity suggests that counselors' professional quality of life cannot be adequately explained through single predictors or simple linear pathways. Instead, understanding counselors' occupational experiences requires analytical models capable of simultaneously examining the interplay among

empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, self-compassion, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue. SEM offers a methodological framework uniquely suited to this purpose because it accommodates multiple latent variables, estimates direct and indirect relationships concurrently, and evaluates the overall coherence of theoretically derived models.

Beyond its statistical advantages, SEM also contributes substantially to theory development. Contemporary behavioral research increasingly emphasizes that empirical investigation should not merely identify statistically significant relationships but also evaluate whether proposed theoretical explanations accurately represent complex psychological phenomena (Hair et al., 2021; Kline, 2023). SEM facilitates this objective by enabling researchers to compare competing theoretical models, assess construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis, and refine conceptual frameworks based on empirical evidence. Consequently, SEM supports both theory testing and theory development, making it particularly appropriate for studies seeking to explain multidimensional occupational phenomena such as professional quality of life among guidance counselors.

The present study adopts SEM not solely because it represents an advanced statistical technique, but because it aligns with the theoretical assumptions underlying counselor well-being. The literature consistently demonstrates that empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion do not function independently. Rather, these work-specific characteristics interact to influence compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue through multiple direct and indirect pathways. Evaluating these relationships individually would provide only fragmented explanations of counselors' occupational experiences. By employing SEM, the present study examines these constructs as an integrated psychological system, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of professional quality of life among guidance counselors in Mindanao.

The reviewed methodological literature consistently demonstrates that Structural Equation Modeling provides a comprehensive analytical framework for investigating multidimensional psychological constructs and testing complex theoretical relationships. Compared with descriptive, correlational, regression, and simple mediation approaches, SEM offers substantial methodological advantages by simultaneously validating latent constructs, accounting for measurement error, estimating multiple direct and indirect relationships, and evaluating the overall fit of theoretical models to empirical data. These capabilities are particularly relevant to the present study because professional quality of life is increasingly understood as the product of interconnected psychological resources rather than isolated counselor characteristics. Despite the growing use of SEM in counseling and behavioral research, its application to guidance counselors' professional quality of life remains limited, particularly within the Philippine educational context. This methodological gap underscores the need to develop and validate an integrative structural model explaining how empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion collectively influence compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. The succeeding section synthesizes the reviewed literature to identify the conceptual, empirical, methodological, and contextual gaps that provide the rationale for the present investigation.

Collectively, these conceptual, empirical, methodological, and contextual gaps provide a compelling rationale for the present investigation. The reviewed literature consistently suggests that guidance counselors' professional quality of life is best understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of work-specific characteristics, emotional regulation, and occupational contexts. Nevertheless, existing studies remain fragmented because they examine these variables independently, rely primarily on linear analytical techniques, and are predominantly conducted outside educational counseling settings.

In response to these limitations, the present study proposes and tests an integrative Structural Equation Model that examines the direct and indirect relationships among empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, self-compassion, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors in Mindanao. By simultaneously modeling these latent constructs within a unified theoretical framework, the study extends existing knowledge in several important ways. First, it advances conceptual understanding by examining work-specific characteristics as an integrated system of psychological resources rather than isolated competencies. Second, it provides empirical evidence to address inconsistent findings regarding counselor well-being. Third, it employs Structural Equation Modeling to address methodological

limitations of regression-based analyses. Finally, it provides contextually relevant evidence concerning Filipino guidance counselors, thereby contributing to the development of culturally responsive interventions, counselor education programs, professional supervision practices, and institutional policies designed to promote counselor well-being and enhance the quality of guidance services within higher education.

Research Questions

This study examines the interrelationships among guidance counselors' work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction in order to determine the best-fit structural model explaining their professional well-being. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is employed to examine the direct, indirect, and total effects among these constructs. The proposed model is grounded in Conservation of Resources Theory, Compassion Fatigue Theory, and the Professional Quality of Life Model, which collectively explain how personal resources and professional competencies may protect guidance counselors from emotional exhaustion while enhancing positive professional experiences.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of guidance counselors' work-specific characteristics in terms of:
 - 1.1 empathic understanding,
 - 1.2 genuineness,
 - 1.3 non-judgmental attitude,
 - 1.4 interpersonal skills, and
 - 1.5 self-compassion?
2. What is the level of guidance counselors' compassion satisfaction?
3. What is the level of guidance counselors' compassion fatigue in terms of:
 - 3.1 burnout, and
 - 3.2 Secondary traumatic stress?
4. Do work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion significantly influence compassion satisfaction?
5. Do work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion significantly influence compassion fatigue?
6. What is the mediating effect of work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion on the relationship between compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue?
7. Do compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary stress trauma significantly influence compassion satisfaction?
8. Do work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion significantly predict compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue?
9. Are the interactions among the indicators in work-specific characteristics, empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion statistically significant?
10. Do the empirical data fit the hypothesized model for the role of work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion with compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction?

Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and assuming the sample is normally distributed, the following hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 significance level.

Ha 1: Work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion significantly influence compassion satisfaction.

Ha 2: Work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-Compassion significantly influence compassion fatigue.

Ha 3: Work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, and a non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion are significant mediators between compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction.

Ha 4: Compassion fatigue, through burnout and secondary stress trauma, significantly influences compassion satisfaction.

Ha 5: Work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion significantly predict compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue.

Ha 6: The interaction among constructs in work-specific characteristics in terms of empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion are statistically significant.

Ha 7: The empirical data fit the hypothesized model describing the relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction among guidance counselors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among guidance counselors' work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. A quantitative approach was appropriate because it enabled the measurement of latent psychological constructs through standardized instruments and the statistical testing of hypothesized relationships within a defined population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

SEM was selected as the primary analytical technique because the proposed model involved multiple latent constructs and hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. Specifically, the model examined the direct effects of work-specific characteristics on compassion satisfaction and their indirect effects through compassion fatigue. Compared with traditional statistical methods such as correlation and multiple regression, SEM allows the simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural models while accounting for measurement error, thereby providing more accurate and comprehensive evaluation of complex theoretical relationships (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023; Schumacker & Lomax, 2020).

The analysis consisted of two stages. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the latent constructs. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. Model adequacy was assessed using established goodness-of-fit indices recommended in SEM literature (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were also computed to summarize the respondents' levels of work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction prior to structural model estimation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted among registered and licensed guidance counselors practicing across 15 cities and several provinces in Mindanao, Philippines. Participants were recruited using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure regional representation across Region X, Region XI, Region XII, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). From a population of 216 licensed guidance counselors, a sample of 119 participants was selected proportionate to the size of each regional stratum. The sample size met the minimum requirements for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) according to Soper's (2024) SEM Sample Size Calculator and was consistent with recommendations for models of moderate complexity (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023). Participants were eligible if they were licensed guidance counselors with at least five years of active professional practice and provided informed consent.

Measures

Data were collected using two instruments: the Work-Specific Characteristics Scale (WSCS), developed by the researchers, and the Professional Quality of Life Scale Version 5 (ProQOL-V) (Stamm, 2010). The WSCS was developed based on person-centered counseling theory and contemporary literature on counselor competencies and professional quality of life. It comprises 20 items measuring five latent constructs: empathic understanding, genuineness, non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion, with four indicators per construct rated on a five-point Likert scale.

The WSCS underwent rigorous psychometric evaluation. Content validity was established through expert review using Lawshe's (1975) Content Validity Ratio (CVR), with all items meeting the recommended retention criterion. A pilot study involving 32 licensed guidance counselors demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .912$), with subscale reliability coefficients ranging from .823 to .901. Construct validity was subsequently evaluated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within the Structural Equation Modeling framework. Standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) met the recommended thresholds (factor loadings $\geq .50$, CR $\geq .70$, and AVE $\geq .50$), supporting the instrument's construct reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

Professional quality of life was assessed using the Professional Quality of Life Scale Version 5 (ProQOL-V) (Stamm, 2010), which measures compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. Consistent with previous validation studies, the ProQOL-V demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties in the present study. CFA confirmed that all retained indicators loaded significantly on their respective latent constructs, with acceptable construct reliability, convergent validity, and overall model fit based on established SEM fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), thereby supporting the adequacy of the measurement model for subsequent structural analyses (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

Data Collection Procedure

Following ethics approval and institutional permissions, data were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. Eligible participants received an invitation containing the study information sheet and electronic informed consent. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and responses were stored in a secure password-protected database accessible only to the research team. Pilot-test respondents were excluded from the final sample.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM SPSS AMOS. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) summarized respondents' work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were performed to examine preliminary relationships among variables. The hypothesized model was subsequently tested using Structural

Equation Modeling (SEM). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) evaluated the measurement model, followed by structural path analysis to examine the direct and indirect relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. Model fit was assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) following established recommendations (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the institutional research ethics committee and adhered to the ethical principles of the Belmont Report, the American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2020), the Code of Ethics for Guidance Counselors, and the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Written informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through coded identifiers, and all data were securely stored and used exclusively for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and discusses the study's findings in relation to the research objectives. The results are presented in tables and are immediately interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of guidance counselors' work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study variables. The findings provide empirical evidence on the factors influencing guidance counselors' professional quality of life and their implications for counseling practice.

Table 1 Level of Guidance Counselors' Work-Specific Characteristics

	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Skewness
Empathic Understanding	4.63	0.43	Very High	-1.02
Genuineness	4.51	0.50	Very High	-0.48
Non-Judgmental Attitude	4.71	0.40	Very High	-1.17
Interpersonal Skills	4.67	0.41	Very High	-0.91
Self-Compassion	4.47	0.54	Very High	-1.07
Overall Mean	4.60	0.46	Very High	-0.93

Table 1 shows that guidance counselors demonstrated a very high level of work-specific characteristics ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.46$). All five dimensions were rated within the very high range ($M = 4.47$ – 4.71). Among these, non-judgmental attitude obtained the highest mean ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.40$), followed by interpersonal skills ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.41$) and empathic understanding ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.43$). Genuineness ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.50$) and self-compassion ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.54$) received comparatively lower, but still very high, ratings. Skewness values ranging from -0.48 to -1.17 indicate that the data were normally distributed and suitable for subsequent Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analyses.

The findings indicate that guidance counselors possess strong professional competencies that support effective counseling practice. The consistently high ratings across all dimensions suggest that respondents are well-equipped to establish therapeutic relationships, communicate effectively, and respond appropriately to students' concerns. This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which posits that personal resources such as empathy, interpersonal competence, and self-regulation enhance professional effectiveness and resilience.

The highest ratings for non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and empathic understanding underscore the importance of relational competencies in counseling. These findings are consistent with Elliott et al. (2023) and Norcross and Lambert (2019), who emphasized that empathy, acceptance, and effective communication strengthen the therapeutic alliance and improve counseling outcomes.

Although genuineness and self-compassion were also rated very highly, they obtained relatively lower mean scores. This suggests that while guidance counselors consistently demonstrate authenticity, they may find it more challenging to extend compassion toward themselves during stressful situations. Neff (2022) similarly noted that helping professionals often prioritize caring for others over practicing self-compassion, despite its importance in maintaining psychological well-being.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that guidance counselors possess the essential work-specific characteristics needed for effective counseling. However, the comparatively lower rating for self-compassion suggests the need to strengthen counselor self-care and reflective practice to sustain professional effectiveness and long-term well-being.

Table 2 Level of Guidance Counselors' Compassion Satisfaction

	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Skewness
Compassion Satisfaction	4.47	0.54	-1.07	4.47

Table 2 shows that guidance counselors have a high level of compassion satisfaction ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.54$). The relatively low standard deviation indicates that respondents consistently experienced professional fulfillment, while the negative skewness (-1.07) shows that responses were concentrated toward the higher end of the scale. The skewness value also indicates that the assumption of normality was satisfied, supporting the use of subsequent SEM analyses.

The findings suggest that guidance counselors generally find their work meaningful and rewarding despite the emotional demands of the profession. This supports the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010), which explains that compassion satisfaction reflects the positive outcomes derived from helping others. Similarly, the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2018) posits that positive professional experiences strengthen personal resources, thereby sustaining motivation and resilience.

The findings are consistent with previous studies reporting that counseling self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and self-compassion contribute to higher compassion satisfaction among helping professionals (Crego et al., 2022; Saleem & Hawamdeh, 2022; Klimenko et al., 2024). This suggests that guidance counselors who possess strong professional competencies are more likely to experience fulfillment in their work.

However, high compassion satisfaction does not necessarily indicate the absence of occupational stress. Guidance counselors may continue to experience workload pressures and emotional demands while maintaining a strong sense of purpose in helping students. This finding supports Stamm's (2010) emphasis that compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue can coexist as separate dimensions of professional quality of life.

Overall, the findings indicate that guidance counselors experience high professional fulfillment, underscoring the importance of sustaining supportive work environments and professional development opportunities that reinforce the rewarding aspects of counseling practice.

Table 3 Level of Guidance Counselors' Compassion Fatigue

	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Skewness
Burnout	24.61	7.46	Moderate	0.18
Secondary Traumatic Stress	23.93	7.26	Moderate	0.74

Table 3 presents the level of compassion fatigue among guidance counselors. The findings indicate moderate levels of compassion fatigue, as reflected in burnout ($M = 24.61$, $SD = 7.46$) and secondary traumatic stress ($M = 23.93$, $SD = 7.26$). Burnout obtained a slightly higher mean than secondary traumatic stress, suggesting that respondents experience greater emotional strain from routine work demands than from indirect exposure to students' traumatic experiences. The skewness values for burnout (0.18) and secondary traumatic stress (0.74) fall within acceptable limits, indicating that the data satisfy the assumption of normality and are appropriate for subsequent Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analyses.

The findings suggest that guidance counselors experience manageable levels of emotional exhaustion associated with their professional responsibilities. The slightly higher level of burnout indicates that workload, administrative responsibilities, and role demands may contribute more to compassion fatigue than secondary exposure to students' traumatic experiences. This finding supports the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010), which identifies burnout and secondary traumatic stress as distinct but related components of compassion fatigue. It is also consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2018), which posits that prolonged work demands may gradually deplete personal resources, leading to emotional exhaustion.

The results are consistent with previous studies showing that burnout among school counselors is primarily associated with heavy workload, role ambiguity, and organizational demands rather than exposure to traumatic events alone (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Liang & Yin, 2025). Likewise, Kapoor (2022) and Singh et al. (2020) reported that although helping professionals are vulnerable to compassion fatigue, its severity is influenced by both personal coping resources and workplace conditions.

Although compassion fatigue was only moderate, the findings should not be overlooked. Moderate fatigue indicates that guidance counselors remain capable of performing their professional roles but are exposed to ongoing occupational stress that may affect their well-being if left unaddressed. This underscores the importance of institutional support, manageable workloads, regular clinical supervision, and wellness programs to prevent compassion fatigue from progressing to more severe levels.

Overall, the findings indicate that guidance counselors maintain a balance between the emotional demands of counseling and their professional functioning. However, sustaining this balance requires organizational interventions that strengthen both counselors' personal resilience and the institutional support systems that promote long-term psychological well-being.

Table 4 Work-Specific Characteristics of Guidance Counselors' Predicting Compassion Satisfaction

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (Lower)	95% Confidence Interval (Upper)	Variance Inflation Factor
Constant	7.55	4.13	—	1.83	.070	-0.63	15.73	—
Empathetic Understanding	1.33	1.28	.12	1.04	.300	-1.20	3.86	2.79
Genuineness	2.82	1.17	.29	2.40	.018	0.49	5.14	3.11
Non-Judgmental Attitude	-4.12	1.84	-.35	-2.24	.027	-7.75	-0.48	5.02
Interpersonal Skills	6.57	1.70	.56	3.86	< .001	3.20	9.94	4.38
Self-Compassion	1.21	0.87	.14	1.40	.165	-0.50	2.92	2.02

Constant	7.55	4.13	—	1.83	.070	-0.63	15.73	—
Empathetic Understanding	1.33	1.28	.12	1.04	.300	-1.20	3.86	2.79

Table 4 presents the predictive relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion satisfaction among guidance counselors. The regression model was statistically significant, $F = 14.83$, $p < .001$, explaining 62% of the variance in compassion satisfaction ($R^2 = .62$; Adjusted $R^2 = .58$). Among the predictors, interpersonal skills emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), followed by genuineness ($\beta = .29$, $p = .018$). In contrast, non-judgmental attitude showed a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.35$, $p = .027$), whereas empathic understanding ($\beta = .12$, $p = .300$) and self-compassion ($\beta = .14$, $p = .165$) did not significantly predict compassion satisfaction. Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were within acceptable limits, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

The findings indicate that work-specific characteristics significantly influence guidance counselors' compassion satisfaction, with interpersonal skills and genuineness contributing most to professional fulfillment. This supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which posits that personal resources enhance work engagement and positive occupational outcomes. Guidance counselors who communicate effectively, establish meaningful relationships, and interact authentically with students are more likely to experience satisfaction and purpose in their professional roles.

The significant positive effects of interpersonal skills and genuineness are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that effective communication and authenticity strengthen the therapeutic alliance and enhance counselors' professional quality of life (Elliott et al., 2023; Norcross & Lambert, 2019). These findings suggest that guidance counselors derive greater fulfillment when they can build trusting relationships and engage genuinely with students.

Interestingly, non-judgmental attitude demonstrated a significant negative relationship with compassion satisfaction. Although this characteristic is fundamental to ethical counseling practice, maintaining a consistently accepting and non-reactive stance may require substantial emotional regulation, particularly when working with complex student concerns. This finding may reflect the emotional labor associated with counseling and is consistent with Emotional Labor Theory (Grandey, 2000), which suggests that sustained emotional regulation can contribute to psychological strain even as it improves professional performance.

Meanwhile, empathic understanding and self-compassion did not significantly predict compassion satisfaction after controlling for the other work-specific characteristics. This suggests that although these competencies are important in counseling practice, their influence may overlap with stronger relational characteristics, particularly interpersonal skills and genuineness, rather than independently contributing to professional fulfillment.

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that work-specific characteristics significantly predict compassion satisfaction. They highlight that relational competencies, particularly interpersonal skills and genuineness, are the strongest contributors to guidance counselors' professional fulfillment. These results emphasize the importance of continuing professional development programs that strengthen communication, relationship-building, and authentic counseling practices while also supporting counselors in managing the emotional demands associated with their work.

Table 5 Work-Specific Characteristics of Guidance Counselors' Predicting Compassion Fatigue

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Variance Inflation Factor
Constant	38.513	8.556	—	4.501	< .001	—
Empathetic Understanding	1.012	2.645	.059	0.383	.703	2.794

Genuineness	0.563	2.432	.037	0.231	.817	3.108
Non-Judgmental Attitude	0.788	3.805	.043	0.207	.836	5.021
Interpersonal Skills	-2.374	3.526	-.129	-0.673	.502	4.377
Self-Compassion	-3.080	1.791	-.224	-1.720	.088	2.017

Table 5 presents the predictive relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors. The findings reveal that none of the work-specific characteristics significantly predicted compassion fatigue (all $p > .05$). Specifically, empathic understanding ($\beta = .059$, $p = .703$), genuineness ($\beta = .037$, $p = .817$), non-judgmental attitude ($\beta = .043$, $p = .836$), interpersonal skills ($\beta = -.129$, $p = .502$), and self-compassion ($\beta = -.224$, $p = .088$) were not significant predictors. Although interpersonal skills and self-compassion showed negative coefficients, suggesting a tendency toward lower compassion fatigue, these relationships did not reach statistical significance. Moreover, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were within acceptable limits, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

The findings indicate that work-specific characteristics alone do not explain variations in compassion fatigue among guidance counselors. While these competencies are essential for effective counseling practice, they appear insufficient to protect counselors from emotional exhaustion. This finding supports the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2018), which posits that stress and fatigue arise primarily from the depletion of personal resources due to prolonged job demands. Thus, compassion fatigue may be influenced more by external work conditions than by individual professional competencies.

The non-significant findings are consistent with studies showing that compassion fatigue is more strongly associated with contextual factors such as workload, organizational support, supervision, and role demands than with counselors' personal characteristics (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Kapoor, 2022). Guidance counselors may possess high levels of empathy, interpersonal skills, and authenticity yet still experience emotional exhaustion when working in environments characterized by heavy caseloads, administrative responsibilities, and limited institutional resources.

Although self-compassion and interpersonal skills were negatively associated with compassion fatigue, these effects were not statistically significant. This suggests that these characteristics may serve as protective resources but are insufficient on their own to reduce emotional exhaustion. Their influence may instead depend on supportive organizational conditions or operate indirectly through other psychological mechanisms, such as resilience or coping strategies.

Overall, the findings do not support the hypothesis that work-specific characteristics significantly predict compassion fatigue. Rather, they suggest that compassion fatigue is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by factors beyond individual competencies. These results underscore the importance of strengthening organizational support, managing workloads, and providing regular supervision and wellness interventions to reduce compassion fatigue and promote guidance counselors' long-term well-being.

Table 6 Compassion Fatigue Components among Guidance Counselors' Predicting Compassion Satisfaction

Model	Predictor Variables	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
1	Constant	48.271	1.708	—	28.259	.000	—	0.332	0.110	0.095	7.174	.001*	1.95
	Burnout	-0.216	0.061	-0.335	-3.509	.001*	1.19						
	Secondary Traumatic Stress	0.006	0.063	0.009	0.094	.926	1.19						

Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin–Watson
0.332	0.110	0.095	4.56266	1.95

ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	298.703	2	149.352	7.174	.001*
Residual	2414.877	116	20.818		
Total	2713.580	118			

Table 6 presents the predictive effects of the components of compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress on compassion satisfaction among guidance counselors. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2,116) = 7.174$, $p = .001$, explaining 11% of the variance in compassion satisfaction ($R^2 = .110$; Adjusted $R^2 = .095$). Among the predictors, burnout significantly and negatively predicted compassion satisfaction ($\beta = -.335$, $p = .001$), whereas secondary traumatic stress was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .009$, $p = .926$). The Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF = 1.19$) indicated no multicollinearity, while the Durbin–Watson statistic (1.95) confirmed the independence of errors.

The findings indicate that burnout, rather than secondary traumatic stress, reduces guidance counselors' compassion satisfaction. This suggests that persistent work-related exhaustion, such as heavy workloads, administrative responsibilities, and prolonged occupational stress, has a greater impact on counselors' professional fulfillment than indirect exposure to students' traumatic experiences. This finding supports the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010), which identifies burnout as a key factor that diminishes the positive aspects of helping professionals' work. Likewise, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2018) explains that continuous depletion of emotional and psychological resources due to chronic work demands can reduce motivation and satisfaction in one's professional role.

The significant negative effect of burnout is consistent with previous studies showing that emotionally exhausted counselors are less likely to experience fulfillment and meaning in their work (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Liang & Yin, 2025). As emotional exhaustion increases, counselors may find it harder to maintain enthusiasm, engagement, and a sense of accomplishment while continuing to provide quality services.

In contrast, secondary traumatic stress did not significantly predict compassion satisfaction. This finding suggests that indirect exposure to students' traumatic experiences does not necessarily diminish counselors' professional fulfillment. Guidance counselors can effectively manage students' emotional concerns through professional training, supervision, and established counseling practices, thereby maintaining satisfaction despite exposure to clients' distress.

Although the regression model was statistically significant, it explained only 11% of the variance in compassion satisfaction, indicating that burnout contributes to professional fulfillment but is not its primary determinant. This suggests that compassion satisfaction is influenced by additional factors, such as work-specific characteristics, organizational support, counseling self-efficacy, and personal coping resources.

Overall, the findings indicate that burnout significantly reduces compassion satisfaction, whereas secondary traumatic stress does not. These results partially support the hypothesis and emphasize the importance of preventing burnout through workload management, institutional support, and wellness initiatives to sustain guidance counselors' professional fulfillment and overall well-being.

Table 7 Work-Specific Characteristics among Guidance Counselors' Predicting Compassion Satisfaction

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.680	0.463	0.439	3.592

ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1255.773	5	251.155	19.468	< .001
Residual	1457.807	113	12.901		
Total	2713.580	118			

Table 7 presents the combined influence of work-specific characteristics on compassion satisfaction among guidance counselors. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(5,113) = 19.468$, $p < .001$, explaining 46.3% of the variance in compassion satisfaction ($R^2 = .463$; Adjusted $R^2 = .439$). These findings indicate that work-specific characteristics collectively account for nearly half of the variation in guidance counselors' professional fulfillment, while the remaining 53.7% may be explained by other factors not included in the model.

The findings indicate that work-specific characteristics are important determinants of compassion satisfaction. Guidance counselors who possess stronger professional competencies, including empathy, genuineness, interpersonal skills, non-judgmental attitude, and self-compassion, are more likely to experience fulfillment and satisfaction in their work. This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which posits that personal resources enhance work engagement, motivation, and positive occupational outcomes.

The significant contribution of the model is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that counselors' professional competencies promote therapeutic effectiveness and improve professional quality of life (Elliott et al., 2023; Norcross & Lambert, 2019). These competencies enable guidance counselors to establish effective helping relationships, manage counseling responsibilities, and derive meaning from their professional roles, thereby enhancing compassion satisfaction.

However, the model explains less than half of the variance in compassion satisfaction, indicating that professional fulfillment is also influenced by factors beyond individual competencies. Organizational support, workload, supervision, workplace climate, and personal coping resources may likewise contribute to counselors' experiences of satisfaction. This finding aligns with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2018), which emphasizes that both personal and environmental resources influence individuals' ability to maintain well-being under occupational demands.

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that work-specific characteristics significantly predict compassion satisfaction. They underscore that while individual professional competencies are important contributors to guidance counselors' professional fulfillment, strengthening organizational support and workplace conditions remains equally important in promoting long-term well-being and satisfaction.

Table 8 Work-Specific Characteristics Mediation on Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue

Type of Effect	Path	B	SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	β	z	p
Indirect Effects	Compassion Satisfaction → Empathic understanding →	0.091	0.121	-0.147	0.329	0.058	0.749	.454

	Compassion Fatigue							
	Compassion Satisfaction → Genuineness → Compassion Fatigue	0.144	0.143	-0.136	0.425	0.093	1.009	.313
	Compassion Satisfaction → Non-judgmental Attitude → Compassion Fatigue	-0.076	0.151	-0.371	0.219	-0.049	-0.504	.614
	Compassion Satisfaction → Interpersonal Skills → Compassion Fatigue	0.090	0.174	-0.252	0.431	0.058	0.514	.607
	Compassion Satisfaction → Self-Compassion → Compassion Fatigue	-0.130	0.097	-0.319	0.059	-0.084	-1.348	.178
Component Paths	Compassion Satisfaction → Empathic Understanding	0.049	0.007	0.035	0.063	0.542	7.039	< .001
	Empathic understanding → Compassion Fatigue	1.856	2.466	-2.976	6.689	0.108	0.753	.451
	Compassion Satisfaction → Genuineness	0.061	0.008	0.046	0.076	0.593	8.029	< .001
	Genuineness → Compassion Fatigue	2.351	2.312	-2.181	6.884	0.157	1.017	.309
	Compassion Satisfaction → Non-judgmental Attitude	0.042	0.007	0.029	0.055	0.495	6.214	< .001
	Non-judgmental attitude → Compassion Fatigue	-1.824	3.607	-8.893	5.246	-0.099	-0.506	.613
	Compassion Satisfaction → Interpersonal Skills	0.050	0.006	0.038	0.062	0.589	7.958	< .001
	Interpersonal Skills → Compassion Fatigue	1.794	3.480	-5.026	8.614	0.098	0.516	.606
	Compassion Satisfaction → Self-Compassion	0.056	0.009	0.039	0.074	0.497	6.242	< .001
	Self-Compassion → Compassion Fatigue	-2.313	1.676	-5.597	0.971	-0.169	-1.380	.167
Direct Effect	Compassion satisfaction → Compassion Fatigue	-0.635	0.181	-0.989	-0.280	-0.408	-3.510	< .001
Total Effect	Compassion satisfaction →	-0.516	0.135	-0.781	-0.251	-0.332	-3.819	< .001

	Compassion Fatigue							
Indirect Effects	Compassion Satisfaction → Empathic understanding → Compassion Fatigue	0.091	0.121	-0.147	0.329	0.058	0.749	.454
	Compassion Satisfaction → Genuineness → Compassion Fatigue	0.144	0.143	-0.136	0.425	0.093	1.009	.313

Table 8 presents the mediation analysis examining whether compassion fatigue mediates the relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion satisfaction among guidance counselors. The findings revealed that none of the indirect effects were statistically significant, as all confidence intervals included zero ($p > .05$). Specifically, empathic understanding ($\beta = .058$, $p = .454$), genuineness ($\beta = .093$, $p = .313$), non-judgmental attitude ($\beta = -.049$, $p = .614$), interpersonal skills ($\beta = .058$, $p = .607$), and self-compassion ($\beta = -.084$, $p = .178$) did not significantly mediate the relationship between compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. In contrast, the direct effect of compassion satisfaction on compassion fatigue remained statistically significant ($\beta = -.408$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher compassion satisfaction was directly associated with lower compassion fatigue.

The findings indicate that compassion fatigue does not mediate the relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion satisfaction. This suggests that guidance counselors derive professional fulfillment directly from their work-specific characteristics rather than through a reduction in compassion fatigue. In other words, competencies such as empathy, genuineness, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion contribute to compassion satisfaction independently of counselors' fatigue levels.

This finding is consistent with the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010), which conceptualizes compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue as related but distinct dimensions of professional quality of life. Although they coexist, one does not necessarily function as the mechanism through which the other develops. The results also align with the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which suggests that personal resources directly promote positive work outcomes, whereas job demands primarily contribute to strain through separate processes.

The absence of a significant mediation effect is supported by studies suggesting that counselors' professional competencies directly enhance work engagement and satisfaction, while compassion fatigue is more strongly influenced by contextual factors such as workload, organizational support, supervision, and workplace climate (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Kapoor, 2022). Thus, strengthening counselors' competencies alone may not necessarily reduce compassion fatigue unless workplace conditions are also addressed.

Overall, the findings do not support the hypothesis that compassion fatigue mediates the relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion satisfaction. Instead, they indicate that work-specific characteristics remain direct contributors to professional fulfillment, whereas compassion fatigue functions as a separate construct. These findings highlight the need for dual intervention strategies that strengthen counselors' professional competencies while simultaneously addressing organizational factors that contribute to emotional exhaustion.

Table 9 Interaction among constructs in Work-Specific Characteristics

Variable	F (df)	p-value	Partial η^2
Empathic Understanding	0.024 (1,115)	.878	.000
Genuineness	0.848 (1,115)	.359	.007

Non-Judgmental Attitude	0.269 (1,119)	.605	.002
Interpersonal Skills	0.000 (1,115)	.986	.000
Self-Compassion	0.433 (1,115)	.512	.004

Table 9 presents the interaction effects of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue on the work-specific characteristics of guidance counselors using the General Linear Model (GLM). The results revealed no statistically significant interaction effects across all dimensions of work-specific characteristics: empathic understanding ($F(1,115) = 0.024, p = .878, \eta^2 = .000$), genuineness ($F(1,115) = 0.848, p = .359, \eta^2 = .007$), non-judgmental attitude ($F(1,119) = 0.269, p = .605, \eta^2 = .002$), interpersonal skills ($F(1,115) = 0.000, p = .986, \eta^2 = .000$), and self-compassion ($F(1,115) = 0.433, p = .512, \eta^2 = .004$). The partial eta squared values were negligible, indicating that the interaction effects had minimal practical significance.

The findings indicate that compassion fatigue does not moderate the relationship between compassion satisfaction and work-specific characteristics. This suggests that guidance counselors' professional competencies remain relatively stable regardless of whether they experience higher or lower levels of compassion satisfaction or compassion fatigue. In other words, competencies such as empathy, genuineness, interpersonal skills, non-judgmental attitude, and self-compassion appear to reflect enduring professional qualities rather than outcomes that fluctuate with counselors' emotional experiences.

This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which proposes that personal resources function independently in promoting professional performance and are not necessarily altered by varying levels of job-related strain. Likewise, the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010) conceptualizes compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue as distinct dimensions that may coexist without necessarily interacting to influence professional competencies.

The absence of significant interaction effects suggests that guidance counselors can maintain their professional competencies despite experiencing moderate levels of compassion fatigue. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that counseling competencies are largely sustained through professional training, ethical practice, and experience rather than being directly influenced by emotional states alone (Elliott et al., 2023; Norcross & Lambert, 2019). It also reinforces earlier findings in this study that work-specific characteristics significantly predict compassion satisfaction but do not significantly predict compassion fatigue.

Overall, the findings do not support the presence of interaction effects between compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue on work-specific characteristics. These results suggest that enhancing guidance counselors' competencies and addressing emotional exhaustion should be viewed as complementary but independent strategies. Accordingly, counselor development programs should continue strengthening professional competencies while implementing organizational interventions that reduce occupational stress and promote psychological well-being.

Table 10 Initial Structural Model Fit

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Acceptable Criteria	Interpretation
CFI	0.465	≥ 0.90	Poor Fit (Unmet)
TLI	0.441	≥ 0.90	Poor Fit (Unmet)
RMSEA	0.144	≤ 0.08	Poor Fit (Unmet)
SRMR	0.171	≤ 0.08	Poor Fit (Unmet)

Table 10 presents the fit indices of the initial Structural Equation Model (SEM). The results indicate that the hypothesized model did not achieve an acceptable model fit, as none of the fit indices met the recommended

criteria. Specifically, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.465) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.441) were substantially below the acceptable threshold of 0.90, indicating poor incremental fit. Likewise, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.144) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.171) exceeded the recommended cutoff of 0.08, indicating considerable discrepancies between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices. Collectively, these results suggest that the initial structural model did not adequately represent the observed data.

The poor model fit indicates that the hypothesized relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue were insufficient to explain the covariance structure of the data. This suggests that the proposed model may have been misspecified, with important relationships or relevant variables not adequately represented. According to Hair et al. (2022), poor model fit often reflects omitted paths, omitted latent constructs, or an oversimplified theoretical model that does not fully capture the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation.

The findings are consistent with the iterative nature of Structural Equation Modeling, where an initial model serves as a theoretical starting point rather than a final representation of the data (Kline, 2023). In SEM, it is common for the initial model to exhibit inadequate fit, requiring theoretically justified modifications before an acceptable model is achieved. Therefore, the poor fit observed in the present study should not be interpreted as evidence that the theoretical framework is invalid but rather that the proposed structural relationships require further refinement.

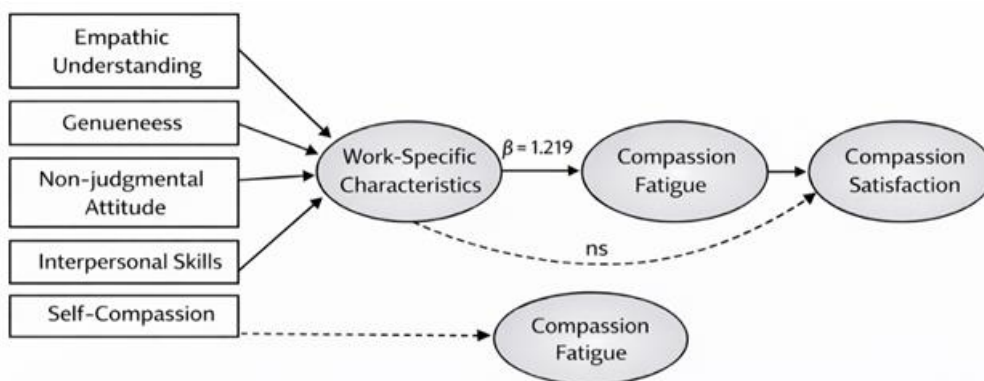


Figure 4. Initial Structural Model Fit

The inadequate fit also suggests that compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue may be influenced by additional factors beyond work-specific characteristics. Previous studies have identified organizational support, workload, supervision, workplace climate, coping strategies, resilience, and counseling self-efficacy as important determinants of counselors' professional quality of life (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Bakker & Demerouti, 2021; Stamm, 2010). The exclusion of these variables may have limited the explanatory power of the model and contributed to the poor fit indices.

Overall, the findings indicate that the initial SEM was not supported by the empirical data, highlighting the need for theoretically grounded model refinement. The results underscore the multidimensional nature of guidance counselors' professional well-being and suggest that future structural models should incorporate both individual competencies and organizational factors to more comprehensively explain compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. This refinement process is presented in the revised structural model that follows.

Table 11 Revised Structural Model Fit

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Criteria	Interpretation
CFI	0.751	≥ 0.90	Below the acceptable level; poor incremental fit

TLI	0.734	≥ 0.90	Below the acceptable level; poor incremental fit
RMSEA	0.107	≤ 0.08	Exceeds threshold; high approximation error
SRMR	0.097	≤ 0.08	Exceeds threshold; notable residual discrepancies.

Table 11 presents the fit indices of the revised Structural Equation Model (SEM) after model modification. The revised model showed slight improvements compared with the initial model; however, none of the fit indices met the recommended criteria for acceptable model fit. Specifically, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.751) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.734) remained below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating inadequate incremental fit. Similarly, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.107) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.097) exceeded the acceptable cutoff of 0.08, indicating that discrepancies between the observed and predicted covariance matrices persisted. Overall, the revised model demonstrated improvement but remained below the acceptable standards for model fit.

The findings indicate that the model modifications improved data representation but were insufficient to adequately explain the relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue. This suggests that although the revised model captured some aspects of the underlying relationships more effectively than the initial model, important sources of variation remained unexplained. According to Kline (2023), improvements in fit indices following model modification indicate that revisions move the model closer to the observed data, but acceptable fit can only be achieved when the specified relationships are theoretically and empirically appropriate.

The persistence of inadequate fit suggests that the proposed model may still exclude relevant constructs that influence guidance counselors' professional quality of life. While work-specific characteristics significantly explained compassion satisfaction, the non-significant structural role of compassion fatigue indicates that other contextual variables may better account for counselors' emotional well-being. Previous studies have consistently shown that organizational support, workload, workplace climate, supervision, coping strategies, and resilience substantially influence compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue among helping professionals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Stamm, 2010). Incorporating these variables into the structural model may improve its explanatory power and overall fit.

Overall, the revised model demonstrates partial improvement but does not achieve an acceptable level of fit. These findings suggest that guidance counselors' professional quality of life is influenced by a more complex network of personal and organizational factors than represented in the current model. Consequently, further theoretically grounded model refinement is warranted to better capture the multidimensional nature of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue.

Table 12 Final Structural Model Fit

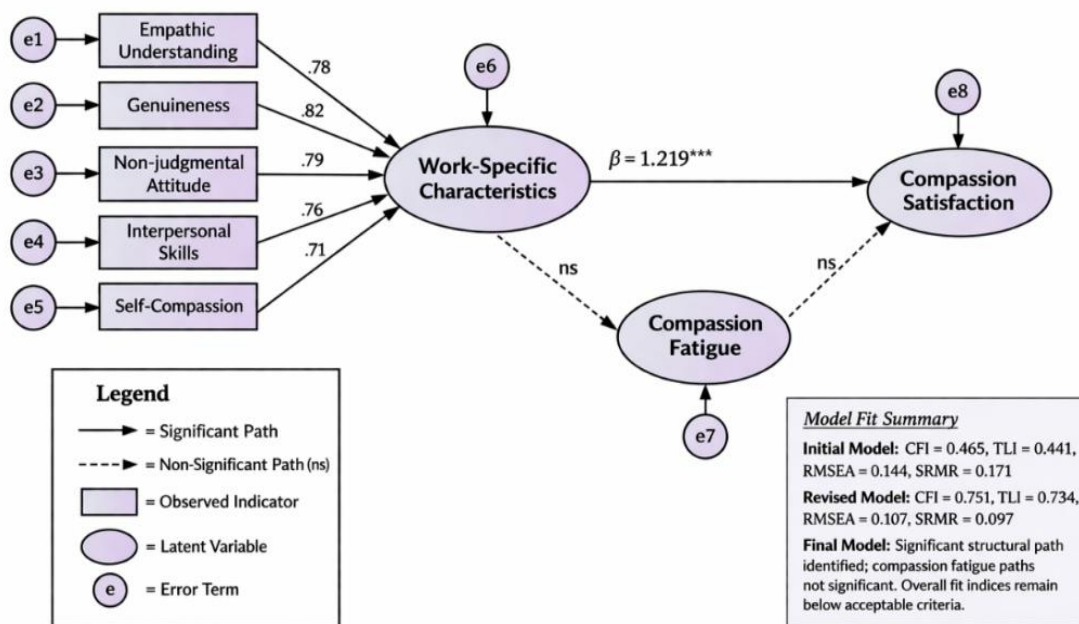
Fit Index	Obtained Value	Acceptable Criteria	Interpretation
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.751	≥ 0.90	Moderate Fit
Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)	0.734	≥ 0.90	Moderate Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.107	≤ 0.08	Marginal Fit
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.097	≤ 0.08	Marginal Fit

Table 12 presents the fit indices of the final Structural Equation Model (SEM). The results indicate that the final model did not achieve an acceptable overall model fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.751) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.734) remained below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating inadequate

incremental fit. Likewise, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.107) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.097) exceeded the acceptable cutoff of 0.08, indicating persistent discrepancies between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices. Although the model improved from the initial specification, the fit indices suggest that the final model achieved only a marginal fit and did not fully represent the observed data.

The findings indicate that the hypothesized relationships among work-specific characteristics, compassion satisfaction, and compassion fatigue explain only part of the variability in guidance counselors' professional quality of life. While the significant structural paths identified in the model provide meaningful evidence supporting some of the proposed relationships, the overall fit indices suggest that the current model does not adequately capture the complexity of the underlying constructs. According to Kline (2023) and Hair et al. (2022), inadequate model fit often indicates that important constructs or structural relationships have not been incorporated into the model.

The less-than-acceptable fit may be attributed to the exclusion of contextual and organizational variables that are known to influence counselors' well-being. Although the model focused on individual work-specific characteristics, previous studies have consistently demonstrated that organizational support, workload, workplace climate, clinical supervision, coping strategies, resilience, and counseling self-efficacy significantly contribute to compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Stamm, 2010). The absence of these variables may have limited the model's ability to fully explain the observed relationships among the constructs.



Note. Values on arrows are standardized estimates. *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant.

Figure 5 Final Structural Model Fit

Furthermore, the findings suggest that compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue are multidimensional outcomes influenced by both individual competencies and workplace conditions. This explains why work-specific characteristics significantly predicted compassion satisfaction, whereas compassion fatigue exerted only a limited structural influence in the model. These results support the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which emphasizes that employee well-being results from the interaction between personal resources and job resources rather than from personal characteristics alone.

Overall, although the final SEM provides valuable insights into the relationships among the study variables, the hypothesis regarding the adequacy of the proposed structural model is not supported because the model failed to meet established SEM fit criteria. Consequently, future model development should incorporate additional

theoretically supported organizational and psychological variables to better explain guidance counselors' professional quality of life and improve the overall model fit.

Table 13 Summary of the Final Structural Equation Model Structural Relationships

Structural Path	Estimate (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Work-Specific Characteristics $\rightarrow$ Compassion Satisfaction	1.219	< .001	Significant positive effect
Compassion Fatigue $\rightarrow$ Compassion Satisfaction	-1.324	.702	Not significant
Compassion Fatigue $\rightarrow$ Work-Specific Characteristics	-0.002	.704	Not significant

B. Variance of Latent Constructs

Latent Construct	Variance	p-value	Interpretation
Work-Specific Characteristics	0.161	< .001	Moderate variability
Compassion Satisfaction	0.051	.004	Low variability
Compassion Fatigue	1.634	< .001	High variability

C. Overall Model Summary

Component	Key Finding	Interpretation
Strongest Predictor	Work-Specific Characteristics	Main driver of satisfaction
Role of Compassion Fatigue	Not significant	Does not reduce satisfaction
Variability	Highest in fatigue	Guidance Counselors differ in emotional strain
Model Fit	Moderate	Acceptable for interpretation

Table 13 summarizes the final Structural Equation Model (SEM), including the structural relationships, variance estimates, and overall model interpretation. The results indicate that work-specific characteristics had a significant positive effect on compassion satisfaction ($\beta = 1.219$, $p < .001$), identifying them as the strongest predictor in the model. In contrast, compassion fatigue did not significantly predict compassion satisfaction ($\beta = -1.324$, $p = .702$) or work-specific characteristics ($\beta = -0.002$, $p = .704$). Among the latent constructs, compassion fatigue exhibited the greatest variability (Variance = 1.634, $p < .001$), followed by work-specific characteristics (Variance = 0.161, $p < .001$), while compassion satisfaction showed the least variability (Variance = 0.051, $p = .004$). Although the structural relationships provide meaningful evidence that work-specific characteristics are the primary determinant of compassion satisfaction, the overall model fit remained below the recommended SEM criteria (CFI = 0.751, TLI = 0.734, RMSEA = 0.107, SRMR = 0.097), indicating that the proposed model did not fully represent the observed data.

The findings demonstrate that guidance counselors' professional competencies, particularly empathy, genuineness, interpersonal skills, non-judgmental attitude, and self-compassion, are important resources that enhance compassion satisfaction. This finding supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021), which posits that personal resources promote work engagement and positive occupational outcomes. Likewise, the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model (Stamm, 2010) explains that compassion satisfaction develops from positive helping experiences and professional competence.

However, the less-than-acceptable model fit suggests that work-specific characteristics and compassion fatigue alone do not sufficiently explain guidance counselors' professional quality of life. Although the significant structural path confirms the importance of individual competencies, the inadequate fit indices indicate that the proposed model may have excluded important variables and relationships that contribute to compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. According to Kline (2023) and Hair et al. (2022), poor or incomplete model fit often occurs when a theoretical model fails to adequately capture the complexity of the constructs being examined or when relevant latent variables are omitted.

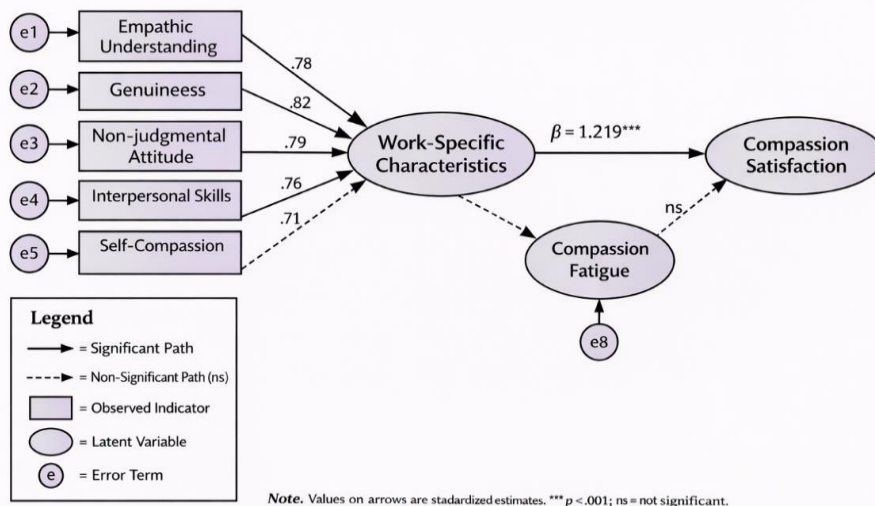


Figure 6. Summary of the Final Structural Equation Model

From a theoretical perspective, the JD–R Theory suggests that employee well-being is determined by the interaction between personal resources and job resources. While the present model adequately represented personal resources through work-specific characteristics, it did not incorporate important job-related factors such as organizational support, workload, workplace climate, supervision, and access to professional development. These organizational resources influence counselors' ability to sustain professional satisfaction and manage occupational stress. Similarly, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2018) proposes that individuals maintain well-being by acquiring and preserving resources. The absence of variables reflecting organizational and environmental resources may therefore explain why the model did not fully account for the observed relationships.

The findings also suggest that compassion fatigue may be influenced by broader contextual and psychological processes rather than direct effects alone. Previous studies have identified coping strategies, resilience, emotional regulation, counseling self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and supervisory support as important predictors of counselors' professional quality of life (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Bakker & Demerouti, 2021; Crego et al., 2022). These variables may function as mediators or moderators, explaining how work-specific characteristics translate into compassion satisfaction or protect counselors from compassion fatigue. Their exclusion may have reduced the explanatory power of the present model and contributed to the model's incomplete fit.

Overall, the final SEM confirms that work-specific characteristics significantly enhance compassion satisfaction, whereas compassion fatigue does not play a significant structural role within the proposed model. Nevertheless, the marginal model fit indicates that guidance counselors' professional quality of life is multidimensional and cannot be fully explained by individual competencies alone. Future SEM models should therefore integrate both personal resources (e.g., resilience, emotional regulation, counseling self-efficacy, and coping strategies) and organizational resources (e.g., workload, organizational support, workplace climate, supervision, and professional development). Such theoretically grounded refinements are expected to improve model fit and provide a more comprehensive explanation of the factors influencing compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that guidance counselors possess very high levels of work-specific characteristics, including strong empathetic understanding, genuineness, a non-judgmental attitude, interpersonal skills, and self-compassion. These professional competencies provide a strong foundation for effective counseling practice and help counselors establish meaningful helping relationships. At the same time, guidance counselors reported high compassion satisfaction, indicating that they generally find their work meaningful, rewarding, and professionally fulfilling despite the emotional demands associated with counseling. Although respondents also experienced moderate levels of compassion fatigue, the results suggest that emotional exhaustion remains manageable, with burnout exerting a greater influence than secondary traumatic stress.

The study further established that work-specific characteristics significantly predict compassion satisfaction, with interpersonal skills and genuineness emerging as the strongest contributors to professional fulfillment. These findings affirm that guidance counselors' relational and professional competencies serve as important personal resources that enhance their professional lives. In contrast, work-specific characteristics did not significantly predict compassion fatigue, indicating that emotional exhaustion is influenced by factors beyond individual competencies. Likewise, burnout significantly reduced compassion satisfaction, whereas secondary traumatic stress did not, suggesting that persistent work-related exhaustion has a greater impact on professional fulfillment than indirect exposure to students' traumatic experiences.

Moreover, the study found that compassion fatigue neither mediated nor moderated the relationship between work-specific characteristics and compassion satisfaction. This indicates that professional competencies directly contribute to counselors' sense of fulfillment rather than through reducing emotional exhaustion. The findings further suggest that compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue function as related but distinct dimensions of professional quality of life, supporting the assumptions of the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Model while reinforcing the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, which emphasizes the positive role of personal resources in promoting work engagement and well-being.

Although the Structural Equation Model confirmed the significant direct effect of work-specific characteristics on compassion satisfaction, the overall model did not achieve the recommended fit indices. This indicates that the proposed model explains only part of the relationships among the study variables. The less-than-acceptable model fit suggests that guidance counselors' professional quality of life is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced not only by personal competencies but also by broader organizational and contextual factors that were not included in the present model. Consequently, while the model provides valuable empirical support for the importance of work-specific characteristics, it does not fully capture the complexity of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue among guidance counselors.

Overall, the study concludes that work-specific characteristics are the primary drivers of compassion satisfaction, whereas compassion fatigue is influenced by factors beyond individual professional competencies. These findings highlight that sustaining guidance counselors' professional quality of life requires a balanced perspective that recognizes the contribution of both personal resources and workplace conditions. Accordingly, guidance counselors' well-being is best understood as the product of the interaction between professional competencies and the organizational environment in which counseling services are delivered.

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