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# Unraveling the Direct and Indirect Effects of Supervisory Working Alliance on Supervisory Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Supervisee Disclosure in Supervision\*

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## ABSTRACT

This research examined the direct and indirect links of supervisory working alliance on supervisory satisfaction. Participants were 291 supervisees who had participated in individual counseling practicum courses either in undergraduate or graduate Psychological Counseling and Guidance program in Turkish universities. Data were collected using the Brief Form of the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (BSWAI-T), Supervisee Disclosure in Supervision Scale (SDSS), and Supervisory Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ). Research results indicated that supervisory working alliance made direct contributions to supervisory satisfaction. In addition, the supervisory working alliance contributed indirectly to supervisory satisfaction via supervisee disclosure in supervision. Supervisory working alliance and supervisee disclosure in supervision explained 56% of the variance in supervisory satisfaction. This study offers novel insights into the role of supervisee disclosure in supervision as an underlying mechanism that operates on the influence of supervisory working alliance on supervisory satisfaction. Implications for the supervision process and counselor training are discussed.

### Keywords:

Counselor training, supervisory working alliance, supervisee disclosure, supervisory satisfaction, indirect effects

## 1. Introduction

Supervision is an integral component of counselor training at all levels of professional development. Supervision is defined as a supplementary, evaluative, and progressive process provided by experienced professionals for less experienced ones to prepare them for their future professional life and enhance their professional experiences (Bernard, & Goodyear, 2019). Numerous studies have been conducted to explore effective ways and models of supervision (Worthington, & Roehlke, 1979; Vannucci et al., 2016). Empirical evidence (e.g., Fernando, & Hulse-Killacky, 2005; Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012; Ladany, Walker, & Melincoff, 2001; Li, Kemer, & Henson, 2020) indicates that supervisory working alliance (SWA) and supervisee disclosure (SD) are among the significant process variables in supervision. In addition, previous studies emphasized that supervisory satisfaction (SS) is an important outcome variable in supervision research (e.g., Britt, & Gleaves, 2011; Ladany et al., 1992; Stewart-Hopkins, 2012).

SS is defined as a supervisee's perception of effective supervision and the extent to which it meets his or her needs and enhances professional development (Ladany et al., 1992). Western studies focusing on SS reveal that SS is predicted by various variables such as SWA (Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999; Stewart-Hopkins,

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2012; Worthington, & Roehlke, 1979), SD in supervision (Ladany et al., 1999; Mehr, Ladany, & Caskie, 2010), characteristics of supervisor (Allen, Szollos, & Williams, 1989; Britt, & Gleaves, 2011; Fernando, 2013; Worthington, & Roehlke, 1979), supervisor feedback (Allen et al., 1989; Britt, & Gleaves, 2011; Vannucci et al., 2016; Worthington, & Roehlke, 1979), setting supervisory goals and evaluation criteria (Vannucci et al., 2016), and allocated time for supervision (Allen et al., 1989; Britt, & Gleaves, 2011; Vannucci et al., 2016). Therefore, SS as an outcome variable seems closely related to the following process variables: SWA and SD in supervision.

SWA is a process variable in supervision and implied as the essence of supervision (Bordin, 1983), and it is conceptualized through various components involved in this process, such as agreeing on mutual supervisory goals and tasks and establishing emotional bonds during supervision (e.g., Bordin, 1983; Ellis, 1991; Holloway, 1995). Bordin (1983), who defined SWA for the first time in the literature, suggested that it allows both sides to establish a supervisory relationship and rebuild it whenever necessary and is closely related to favorable supervision outcomes. This definition grabbed the attention of many researchers in the field, and the number of studies focusing on SWA gradually increased. These studies showed that strong SWA supports the development of supervisees' counseling practices (e.g., Ghazali et al., 2016; Min, 2012), contributes to the development of counseling skills (e.g., Horrocks, & Smaby, 2006), increases SS (e.g., Ghazali et al., 2016; Ladany et al., 1999; Ramos-Sánchez et al., 2002) as well as the effectiveness of supervision practice (e.g., Stewart-Hopkins, 2012). In one of these studies, Ladany et al. (1999) found that supervisees reporting a strong SWA display high levels of SS. In the present research, we also test the predictive role of SWA on supervisory satisfaction in a non-western context.

In addition to investigating the association between SWA and SS, the current study also explores the role of SD in supervision as a potential mediating mechanism in the link between these two variables. SD in supervision has been defined in several ways in the literature. Walsh et al. (2003) defined SD in supervision as supervisees' explanations to supervisors about their challenging experiences with their clients. According to Knox (2015) SD in supervision refers to the supervisee's about his or her reactions and some information about himself/herself and his/her supervisor. An overall review of the definitions in the literature (Hammes, 2014; Hess et al., 2008; Knox, 2015; Ladany et al., 1996; Li et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2003; Yourman, & Farber, 1996) implies that SD in supervision can be defined as a supervisee's voluntarily sharing his/her thoughts, opinions, emotions, and behaviors about his/her past and present counseling experiences with his/her supervisor. A supervisee's disclosing himself/herself about the counseling and supervision process is considered one of the predictors of high levels of SS and optimum benefits from supervision practice (Bordin, 1983; Ladany et al., 1996; Muse-Burke, Ladany, & Deck, 2001). The empirical findings (e.g., Ladany et al., 1996; Mehr et al., 2010; Webb, & Wheeler, 1998) report that strong SWA plays a role in SD in supervision. Similarly, Ladany et al. (1996) highlight that supervisees who report a SWA with their supervisors disclose themselves more easily, which also increases their SS. Under the light of these findings, exploring the role of SD in supervision in the link between SWA and SS seems significant.

A brief review of the supervision studies conducted in Turkey reveal that empirical studies are rather limited and mostly conducted by using qualitative research methods (Koçyiğit-Özyiğit, 2019; Meydan, 2020; Meydan, & Denizli 2018; Meydan, & Koçyiğit, 2019; Ülker-Tümlü et al., 2015). However, more recently, Turkish researchers began to validate various measures assessing supervision processes and outcomes (e.g., Li, Chen, Kemer, Meydan, & Sağkal, 2022; Meydan, & Sağkal 2022, 2023). The studies focusing on SS concluded that SS is related to supervisees' counseling self-efficacy (Pamukçu, 2011; Satıcı, & Türküm, 2015), supervisory relationship (Koçyiğit-Özyiğit, 2019), and supervisor behaviors (Meydan, 2019). According to the results of studies on SWA (Meydan, & Denizli 2018; Meydan, & Koçyiğit, 2019), supervisees at the undergraduate level reported that strong supervisory relationship is closely related to supervision style and duration of supervision. In terms of the results of the studies on SS in supervision (Meydan, 2019; 2020; Meydan, & Koçyiğit, 2019), supervisees think that supervisors' facilitative interventions and constructive feedback make SD in supervision easier.

Overall, we can conclude that there is a growing need to determine and explore the variables playing a role in SS. While the studies in the western literature are mainly quantitative, most of the studies conducted in Turkey are qualitative in nature. Therefore, the present study is significant since a quantitative study in Turkish literature investigates the relationship between SWA and SS for the first time. Furthermore, this study also tests a structural model regarding SD. Accordingly, the present research tests the following hypotheses: (i)

SWA would be directly linked to SS, and (ii) SWA would be indirectly linked to SS through its influence on SD in supervision.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Model

In this research, we used descriptive and correlational research methods to explore the direct and indirect effects of SWA on SS via the mediating role of SD in supervision. While correlational studies help researchers detect the size and direction of the relationships among variables, descriptive research enables the description of characteristics of a phenomenon or a sample group (Karasar, 2003). In this regard, the present research aimed to detect the size and direction of the relations between and among SWA, SD in supervision, and SS. In addition, the present study examined the whether scores on research variables differ with regard to supervision type (individual or group supervision) and gender of supervisee.

### 2.2. Participants

A total of 291 supervisees who had participated in individual counseling practicum courses either in undergraduate or graduate Psychological Counseling and Guidance program in Turkish universities were recruited in the research. The participants responded to the research questions regarding their counseling supervision experiences with their current or most recent supervisor. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *The Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
N	291	100%
Supervisee Gender		
Women	226	77.7%
Men	65	22.3%
Supervisee Age		
21-29	269	92.4%
30-37	22	7.6%
Supervisee Education		
Undergraduate student	176	60.5%
Bachelor's degree	53	18.2%
Master's student	45	15.5%
Master's degree	4	1.4%
Ph.D. student	13	4.5%
Ph.D. degree	-	-
Supervision Type		
Individual supervision	115	39.5%
Group supervision	176	60.5%
Supervision Gender		
Women	193	66.3%
Men	98	33.7%
Supervisor Education		
Ph.D. degree	291	100%

As presented in Table 1, women made up 77.7% ( $n = 226$ ), and men made up 22.3% ( $n = 65$ ) of the sample ( $n = 291$ ). The age of the participants ranged between 21 and 37 ( $M = 24.02$ ;  $sd = 3.07$ ). The participants were predominantly undergraduate students (60.5%). In terms of supervision type, while 60.5% of the participants reported that they received group supervision, 39.5% of the sample reported that they received individual supervision. Supervisors were predominantly women (66.3%). Participants reported that all the supervisors had a Ph.D. degree.

### 2.3. Instruments and Procedure

*Demographic Information Form (DIF)*. The DIF was used to define the characteristics of the participants. The questions included the supervisee age, supervisee gender, educational level, supervision type, supervisor gender, and supervisor educational degree.

*Brief Form of the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (BSWAI-T)*. To assess the quality of the SWA between supervisor and supervisee, we used the BSWAI-T. The SWA Inventory was developed by Efstation, Patton, and Kardash (1990), and its brief form (BSWAI-T) was formed by Sabella, Schultz, and Landon (2020). The BSWAI-T is a 5-item, unidimensional scale. The items are responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Almost never*; 7 = *Almost always*) and higher scores reflect greater SWA. Sabella et al. (2020) reported that the BSWAI-T has strong psychometric properties. Turkish translation and adaptation of the BSWAI-T was conducted by Meydan and Sağkal (2022). Meydan and Sağkal reported that the original factor structure of the BSWAI-T was confirmed in Turkish sample. Turkish version of the BSWAI-T has criterion-related validity and high-reliability coefficient. In the present research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the BSWAI-T was calculated as .77.

*Supervisee Disclosure in Supervision Scale (SDSS)*. We used the SDSS to assess the supervisees' disclosure of their counseling and supervision experiences to supervisors during the supervision. The SDSS was originally developed by Li, Kemer, and Henson (2020). The SDSS is a 17-item, 5-point Likert-type self-administered scale (1 = *Not at all likely*; 5 = *Very likely*) composed of two subscales; supervision-related disclosure and counseling-related disclosure. Higher scores reflect the higher levels of disclosure in supervision. Li et al. (2020) reported that the SDSS has strong psychometric properties. Turkish translation and adaptation of the SDSS was conducted by Li et al. (2022). Li et al. (2022) reported that the two-factor structure of the SDSS was confirmed in Turkish sample. Turkish version of the SDSS has criterion-related validity as well as high reliability. In the current research, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the supervision-related disclosure subscale, counseling-related disclosure subscale, and the SDSS total scale were .90, .84, and .90, respectively.

*Supervisory Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ)*. To assess supervisees' satisfaction with various aspects of supervision, we used the SSQ. The SSQ was developed by Ladany, Hill, and Nutt (1996). The SSQ is a unidimensional, 8-item, 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *No, definitely not*, 4 = *Yes, definitely*). Higher scores reflect higher levels of SS. Ladany et al. (1996) reported that the SSQ has strong psychometric properties. Turkish translation and adaptation of the SSQ was conducted by Meydan and Sağkal (2023). Meydan and Sağkal reported that the original factor structure of the SSQ was confirmed in Turkish sample. Turkish version of the SSQ has criterion-related validity as well as high-reliability coefficient. In the current research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the SSQ was .88.

### 2.4. Procedure

Ethical permission was obtained from the Ege University Scientific Research Ethical Board. Researchers also obtained institutional permission to deliver an online survey to supervisees in Turkish universities' Psychological Counseling and Guidance department. The surveys were distributed online in accordance with the principles of voluntariness and anonymity. The data were collected online due to Covid-19 restrictions. To reach participants, researchers cooperated with the heads of the Psychological Counseling and Guidance departments as well as lecturers conducting individual counseling practicum course. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

In this research, descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated and a model test was conducted. SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0 were used to analyze the data. The Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated among main research variables. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to explore the influence of demographic characteristics on the variables. Measurement and structural models were estimated (Anderson, & Gerbing, 1988). Before the main analyses, the accuracy of data entry and missing values were checked. Standardized z-scores indicated that there were no univariate outliers. Mahalanobis *d*-squared distance showed that there were no multivariate outliers within the sample (Byrne, 2010). Skewness and kurtosis values ranging between -1 and +1 indicated that the data were normally distributed. As Mardia's coefficient was above the threshold of 5.00 (C.R. = 49.781), the bootstrapping technique was used to estimate

model parameters (Preacher, & Hayes, 2008). To test the significance of indirect effects, bootstrapping with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 5000 bootstrap samples was used. For the evaluation of the model, we used the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Levis Index (TLI), and Root Means Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).  $CFI \geq .90$ ,  $TLI \geq .90$ , and  $RMSEA \leq .08$  values are regarded as indicative of adequate model fit (Byrne, 2010).

## 2.6. Ethical

Ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board at Ege University (date and document number: 02/25/2021 and 814).

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alfa coefficients, and correlations among SWA, SD, and SS were presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Research Variables (N = 291)

	1	2	3
1. Supervisory working alliance	-		
2. Supervisee disclosure in supervision	.48**	-	
3. Supervisory satisfaction	.63**	.57**	-
Range	1-7	1-5	1-4
Mean	6.30	3.70	3.58
Sd	.62	.75	.43
A	.77	.90	.88

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ , Sd = standard deviation, A = Cronbach's alpha

As can be seen in Table 2, all correlations between SWA, SD, and SS were statistically significant. As expected, SWA was positively associated with SD ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and SS ( $r = .63$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, supervisees reporting high levels of disclosure in supervision were likely to report greater levels of SS ( $r = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, a 2X2 factorial MANOVA with levels of supervision type (individual and group) and levels of gender (female and male) indicated that the multivariate interaction effect of supervision type and gender was not statistically significant (Pillai's Trace = .002,  $F_{(3, 284)} = .204$ ,  $p = .893$ ).

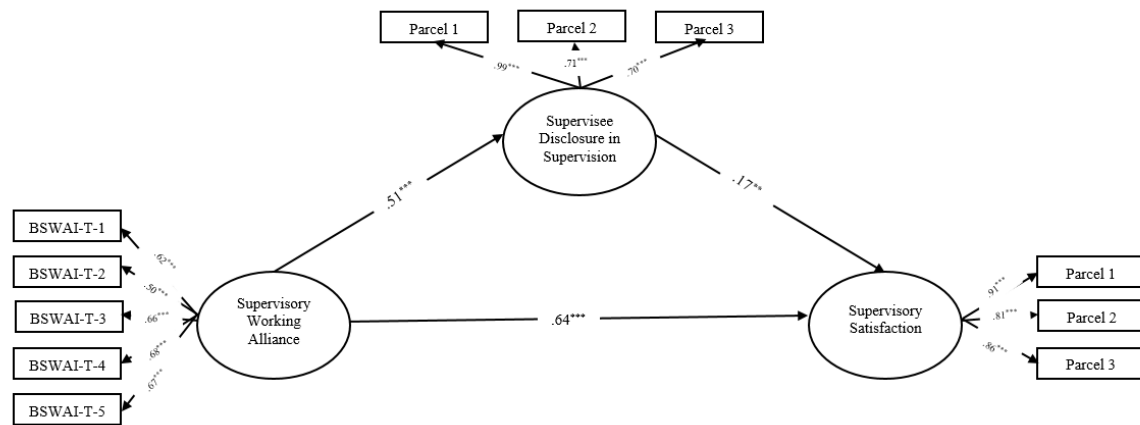
### 3.2. Measurement Model

This research's measurement model comprised 11 observed variables and three first-order latent variables (SWA, SD, and SS). The latent construct of SWA was represented by the 5-item BSWAI-T (Sabella et al., 2020; Meydan, & Sağkal, 2022). SD in supervision was represented by three parcels constructed from the 17-item SDSS using the item-to-construct balance technique (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). SS was represented by three parcels created from the 8-item SSQ (Ladany et al., 1996; Meydan, & Sağkal, 2023). The results of confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the measurement model did not provide an acceptable model-fit to the data:  $\chi^2(41) = 129.469$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.16$ , CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .09 CI [.07, .10]. Inspection of the modification indices suggested adding an error covariance between BSWAI-T item 1 and BSWAI-T item 2 would substantially improve model fit. We reran the model after adding an error covariance between BSWAI-T item 1 and BSWAI-T item 2. The results indicated that the measurement model provided an acceptable model-fit:  $\chi^2(40) = 103.171$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.58$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .07 CI [.06, .09]. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .50-.68 for SWA, .70-.99 for SD in supervision, and .81-.91 for SS. All the standardized factor weights and correlations among latent constructs were significant at .001 level.

### 3.3. Structural Model

The hypothesis model included a predictive variable (supervisory working alliance), a mediator (supervisee disclosure in supervision), and an outcome variable (supervisory satisfaction). The results of structural equation modeling showed that the hypothetical model provided an adequate fit with data:  $\chi^2(40) = 103.171$ ,

$p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.58$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .07 CI [.06, .09]. All the parameter estimates for observed variables as well as the hypothesized paths were significant at .01 level.



Note. Standardized regression weights are presented. \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 1. The Structural Model

As it is seen in Figure 1, SWA was positively linked with SD in supervision ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and in turn, SD in supervision was positively associated with SS ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Moreover, it was detected that SWA is positively linked with SS ( $\beta = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). SWA and SD in supervision accounted for 56% of the variance in supervisory satisfaction. To test the significance of indirect effects, we used the bootstrapping method (5.000 resamples) with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

Table 3. Standardized Indirect Effects and 95% Confidence Intervals

Model	Model estimate	SE	BC %95 CI	
			Low	Up
SWA → SD in supervision → SS	.09	.06	.001	.20

Note. BC = bias corrected; CI = confidence interval.

As it is presented in Table 3, the results of the bootstrapping method showed that the indirect effect of SWA on SS is significant ( $\beta = .09$ , 95% CI [.001, .20]). This result suggests that higher levels of SWA are linked to a greater level of SD in supervision, which are in turn linked to higher levels of supervisory satisfaction. Consequently, the present finding highlights that the main hypothesis of the research was confirmed. Furthermore, we detected that the direct effect of SWA on SS was significant ( $\beta = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) when controlling for the mediator variable (SD in supervision). Therefore, we concluded that SD in supervision partially mediates the link between SWA and SS.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

Current study aimed to explore SWA's direct and indirect effects on supervisory satisfaction. For the purposes of the study, the quantitative data was collected from 291 participants who met the following criteria: attending Guidance and Counseling Departments both at undergraduate and graduate levels in Turkey or being a graduate of these departments, and taking Individual Counseling Practicum Course during their education. The study findings indicated that SWA significantly predicts SS, and SD in supervision mediates the association between SWA and SS. In other words, the increase in SWA links with greater levels of SD in supervision, and the increase in SD in supervision is associated with higher levels of supervisory satisfaction.

According to the results of the study, SWA is an important predictor of SS. Several studies are focusing on the relationship between SWA and SS in the western literature. For example, Worthington and Roehlke (1979) reported that SS correlates with supervisory relationship quality in first-time supervisees in counseling practice. Similarly, Ladany et al. (1992) found that perceived SWA of supervisees significantly predicts SS and leads to more effective supervision. Another study conducted by Ladany et al. (1999) also reports that SS of supervisees at master's and Ph.D. levels significantly and positively predicts SWA. Similarly, Cheon et al. (2009) suggest that SWA strongly predicts supervisory satisfaction. The studies by Britt and Gleaves (2011)

and Park and colleagues (2019) highlight that SS can be explained through the cooperation between supervisor and supervisee and developing a common understanding of supervisory goals and tasks. We should remember that developing such an understanding is one of the most significant components of Bordin's (1983) SWA model. Finally, Stewart-Hopkins (2012) also argues that the supervisory relationship predicts the satisfaction of supervisees who receive supervision at master's degree level.

In one of the studies conducted in Turkey on SWA and SS, Büyükgöze-Kavas (2011) suggested that supervisees attending master's and Ph.D. degree programs reported positive communication and relationship between supervisors and supervisees as the key components leading to more effective supervision. Meydan and Denizli (2018), in their study focusing on the opinions of supervisees at the undergraduate level, argued that one of the favorable outcomes of the supervision relationship is supervisory satisfaction. Similarly, Koçyiğit-Özyiğit (2019) noted that the SWA has a significant effect on satisfaction of supervisees attending undergraduate programs. An overall review of the studies on SS and SWA in Turkey and western studies reveals that these findings are consistent with those of the present study. The present study emphasizes that the good quality of SWA between supervisors and supervisees in Turkey at undergraduate and graduate levels is essential in supervision practices.

Another crucial finding of the present study is that SD in supervision has a mediating role between SWA and SS. Theoretical explanations argue that SS increases when a supervisee discloses himself/herself during supervision (Bordin, 1983; Muse-Burke et al., 2001). Ladany et al. (1996) noted that strong SWA facilitates SD in supervision, which in turn increases SS. Therefore, consistent with Ladany et al. (1996), this study clearly reflects the nature of links between SWA, SD in supervision, and SS. Previous research also found that SS decreases, and supervisees find it challenging to disclose themselves (Bang, & Goodyear, 2014; Hess et al., 2008; Mehr et al., 2010; Meydan, 2020; Yourman, & Farber, 1996) due to specific reasons such as failing to agree on supervisory goals and establish rapport as well as failing to cooperate and establish SWA (e.g., Ladany, & Lehrman-Waterman, 1999; Meydan, 2020). In conclusion, the present study's finding, which emphasizes that SD in supervision mediates between SWA and SS, is consistent with previous studies in the literature. However, when SD in the supervision variable is considered in the model's test, the significant regression coefficient determined between SWA and SS implies a partially mediating role of SD in supervision. Essentially, SD is seen as a related aspect of the SWA in the supervision process. Based on this finding, there would be any other potential mediating mechanisms (e.g., counseling self-efficacy, supervisor feedback, and supervisor disclosure, etc.) in the association between SWA and SS.

Although this study reports important findings regarding the relationships between SWA, SD in supervision and SS, some limitations should be considered while interpreting the results. First, this study's findings are based on a cross-sectional data set. Therefore, it is not possible to make causality implications for the variables. In the future, experimental studies might be conducted by focusing on different variables to investigate quality supervision and SS in more detail, or longitudinal data sets might be collected to test interactions between the variables. Secondly, the present study's data were collected mainly from undergraduate students of Guidance and Counseling Departments, which is another limitation of the study. Further studies might be carried out with master and Ph.D. students and professional counselors so that multiple group analyses might be done. Finally, relying on self-report data would pose response bias, such as social desirability. Future studies might also collect data from supervisors in addition to supervisees, and the data might be triangulated by using different data collection techniques such as observation and interview.

## 5. Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this quantitative study, which unraveled the direct and indirect effects of SWA on SS, is believed to be enlightening and encouraging for researchers while designing further studies on supervision and its outcomes. In addition, it can be said that the findings of this study provide valuable insights for counseling educators and supervisors. The study also concluded that SWA is an important premise of supervisory satisfaction. In light of this finding, educators and supervisors working in the field might pay special attention to establishing strong SWA with supervisees and other similar components that might support this alliance. Moreover, the study indicated that SD in supervision is a significant mediating mechanism in the relationship between SWA and SS. This finding emphasizes the importance of supporting SD in supervision and creating a supervision atmosphere that facilitates this type of disclosure. Therefore, it



can be suggested that establishing a strong SWA is essential to build up SS. Similarly, supervisees can disclose themselves more easily when SWA is established, which can positively contribute to supervisory satisfaction.

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