

## Original Article

**Analysis of the association between problem behaviors and Sasang typology in high school students**Mi Hwa Choi<sup>a</sup>, Han Chae<sup>b</sup>, Soo Jin Lee<sup>a,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Psychotherapy, College of Nursing and Public Health, Kyungil University, Gyeongsan, Gyeongbuk, Korea<sup>b</sup> Division of Longevity and Biofunctional Medicine, School of Korean Medicine, Pusan National University, Busan, Korea

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Some studies have shown that Sasang typology is related to specific problem behaviors, but research on the associations between Sasang types and problem behaviors in children is scarce. The purpose of this study was to examine the associations between Sasang types and problem behaviors in Korean high school students.

**Methods:** A total of 686 Korean high school students (371 boys and 315 girls) completed the Korean version of Youth Self-Report (YSR) for describing the problem behaviors in adolescents and the Sasang Personality Questionnaire (SPQ) for measuring the temperament characteristics of Sasang typology. The correlation between YSR and SPQ subscales was investigated, and the differences of YSR among the high (30%), middle (40%), and low (30%) SPQ total score groups were examined with Analysis of variance. The profile analysis was also performed to compare YSR subscale profiles of three SPQ total score groups.

**Results:** The SPQ total score significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlated positively with YSR externalizing problems ( $r = 0.293$  and  $r = 0.248$ ) and negatively with YSR internalizing problems ( $r = -0.211$  and  $r = -0.150$ ) in males and females, respectively. The YSR externalizing problem score is significantly higher in the high SPQ total score group ( $13.14 \pm 9.33$  and  $10.03 \pm 5.34$  for males and females, respectively) than in the low SPQ total score group ( $8.18 \pm 5.53$  and  $8.58 \pm 5.73$ , respectively), and the YSR internalizing problem score is significantly higher in the low SPQ total score group ( $11.28 \pm 8.92$  and  $12.97 \pm 8.69$  for males and females, respectively) than in the high SPQ total score group ( $9.35 \pm 9.00$  and  $11.28 \pm 7.58$ , respectively). The YSR profiles for three SPQ total score groups were significantly different for males (profile analysis,  $df = 12.324$ ,  $F = 18.164$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and females ( $df = 12.677$ ,  $F = 11.601$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

\* Corresponding author. Department of Psychotherapy, College of Nursing and Public Health, Kyungil University, 50 Gamasil-gil, Gyeongsan, Gyeongbuk 38428, Korea.

E-mail address: [leesooj@gmail.com](mailto:leesooj@gmail.com) (S.J. Lee).

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*Conclusion:* These results could be recognized as the SPQ, and Sasang typology would be useful for predicting the pathological patterns even of psychological problems in high school students. This study would be useful for the screening of psychopathological problems and character development in adolescents.

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## 1. Introduction

Sasang typology, used in traditional Korean medicine, categorizes people into four Sasang types, Tae-Yang, Tae-Eum, So-Yang, and So-Eum types,<sup>1,2</sup> and provides type-specific disease susceptibility for each Sasang type. Since Sasang typology is defined as mind-body medicine,<sup>3,4</sup> the mind or psychological approach in Sasang typology has been well studied.<sup>4-12</sup> The personality characteristics using various personality assessments such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, NEO-Personality Inventory Revised (NEO-PI-R), and Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) have been examined.

It was reported that So-Yang types are extrovert in both Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and NEO-PI-R,<sup>7,11,12</sup> and showed a low score in NEO-PI-R neuroticism,<sup>8</sup> and So-Eum types are introvert in Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>6,11</sup> and demonstrated a high score of neuroticism in NEO-PI-R.<sup>8,12</sup> In addition, So-Yang types displayed a high score of novelty seeking and a low score of harm avoidance, and So-Eum types showed the opposite features of a low novelty seeking score and a high harm avoidance score in TCI.<sup>4,9,10,13,14</sup> The features of Tae-Eum types in TCI were located in the middle between So-Eum and So-Yang types.<sup>4</sup>

While the majority of the previous studies mentioned above have focused on the general psychological aspects of Sasang types, a relatively small amount of research focused on the pathological ones.<sup>15-19</sup> The associations between Sasang typology and psychopathology or type-specific problem behaviors are examined by such instruments as Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Symptom Checklist-90-Revised, Beck Depression Inventory, State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, and so forth. For instance, So-Eum types displayed a high score in MMPI Hypochondriasis and Psychasthenia scales,<sup>15,16</sup> and a high trait anxiety score in State-Trait Anxiety Inventory,<sup>19</sup> and So-Yang types showed a low score in MMPI Depression scale, a high score in MMPI Mania scale,<sup>15,16</sup> and a low trait anxiety score in State-Trait Anxiety Inventory,<sup>19</sup> which means that So-Eum types are more anxious and depressed than So-Yang types.

In other words, So-Eum types might have internalizing problem behaviors focusing on one's self and So-Yang types have externalizing problem behaviors involving the outside world, as suggested by the previous studies on Sasang typology<sup>4,9,10,13,14</sup> and TCI.<sup>20-22</sup> For measuring the problem behaviors, Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment, which has two high-order factors of externalizing problem behaviors (i.e., aggressive, rule-breaking behaviors) and internalizing problem behaviors (i.e., depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints) was used.<sup>23</sup> However, some studies showed contrary results that So-Yang types displayed

higher scores in somatization in the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised<sup>18</sup> and demonstrated significantly higher scores in depression/anxiety and somatization scales<sup>17</sup> in Child Behavior Checklist in a clinical setting.<sup>17</sup>

To sum up, there were mixed results regarding the relationship between psychopathology and Sasang typology, especially for So-Yang and So-Eum Sasang types. Moreover, those type-specific problem behaviors are mostly investigated in adult samples in both general and clinical settings, and not in children or adolescents because of a lack of proper assessment tools for Sasang types.<sup>17,24,25</sup>

Therefore, the aim of the current study is to examine the relationship between problem behaviors and Sasang types using the recently developed Sasang Personality Questionnaire (SPQ). We tested whether So-Yang types are associated with externalizing problem behaviors and So-Eum types with internalizing problem behaviors, as illustrated in Fig. 1 with correlation and Analysis of variance. This study would provide foundations for establishing psychopathological studies on adolescents with Sasang typology.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 686 students from high schools in the Daegu metropolitan area completed the Youth Self-Report (YSR) and SPQ, which tapped the problem behaviors and Sasang personality characteristics, respectively. The procedures were approved by the Internal Review Board of Kyungil University, Gyeongsan, South Korea. All participants provided written informed consent for the study.

### 2.2. Sasang Personality Questionnaire

The SPQ<sup>26</sup> is a recently developed 14-item self-report assessment tool measuring temperament characteristics from the perspective of the Sasang typology. The SPQ has shown acceptable clinical validity and reliable psychometric properties.<sup>26-28</sup> Each item is composed of two opposite words, each describing a specific personality trait, and participants must choose one of three responses on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = delicate, 2 = average or middle, and 3 = tough).

The SPQ is based on the concepts of Yin-Yang and Confucianism and composed of three subscales that measure the behavioral (SPQ-Behavior), emotional (SPQ-Emotionality), and decision-making or cognitive components (SPQ-Cognition) of personality. Internal consistency of the SPQ for the present study was 0.76.

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