



A validation study on DAS in the prediction of suicidal risk for adolescents

Chi Hong Park^{a,1}, Gab Sook Kim^{b,*}

^a 101-1701, Geumjeongsan SK-view, Jangjeon 2-dong, Geumjeong-gu, Busan, Republic of Korea

^b Department of Art Therapy, Graduate School of Yeungnam University 214-1 Dae-dong, Gyeongsan-si, Gyeongsangbuk-do (712-749), Republic of Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Draw-a-Story
Emotional content
Self-image
Prediction of suicidal risk

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships between the predicted suicidal risk in adolescents and the response shown through Silver's Draw-a-Story (DAS) assessment. In addition, the reliability and validity of DAS assessment as a prediction of suicidal risk tool were examined. A total of 413 students from 6 middle schools in a large urban city (Busan) of South Korea participated. The suicidal prediction scale and DAS assessment were used as study instruments. In the emotional content and self-image scores, inter-raters and intra-rater reliabilities were calculated at $r = .867-.978$ and $r = .957-.984$, respectively. In terms of the correlation for convergent validity between DAS score and suicidal risk, a negative correlation was observed in both emotional content and self-image. In addition, emotional content score and self-image score differed according with the level of suicidal risk, which therefore validated the DAS assessment. This verification of the reliability and validity of DAS as an assessment tool for predicting the suicidal risk of adolescents will enable DAS assessment to be applied in practical cases of adolescent counseling and psychotherapy.

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Introduction

Suicide is referred to as 'a social pathological phenomenon' in developed countries. About 1 million people worldwide commit suicide annually and the rate is increasing at a serious level. Korea now shows the highest suicide rate and the highest increase rate of suicide among the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. The incidence of suicide among celebrities and star entertainers has significantly increased recently. Moreover, the incidence of double suicide through suicide Internet web sites has become a new trend in Korea, and copycat suicides caused by the 'Werther effect' have become a social issue. According to the result of a 2009 survey released by the National Statistical Office in 2010, 15,413 people a year, or 42.2 people a day, committed suicide on average (Korea National Statistical Office, 2010).

More serious school bullying has become widely spread among adolescents (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), and school violence, which often results in suicide. According to a study conducted on 73,238 students in grades 7 through 12 between September 2010 and September 2011 by Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 14,135 (19.3%) students have experienced suicidal ideation, 3662 (5%) students attempted to commit suicide, and 353

adolescents aged 10 to 19 years died of suicide in 2010, equating to a daily adolescent death (Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). According to a survey on suicidal impulse and suicidal attempt targeting 777 elementary, middle school and high school students conducted by Yoisu City Adolescents Counseling Center, female adolescents (64%) showed a higher rate than male adolescents (45.2%). Most adolescents had suicidal ideation for the first time in middle school (56%), followed by elementary school (35%) and high school (8.5%). Causes of suicidal impulse included school violence such as school bullying and beating, stress arisen by expectations and control from parents, family friction, depression caused by school records, and relationships of teenagers (Anat et al., 2011; Kim & Lee, 2010; Kim, 2009a, 2009b).

Depression may be the most influential individual factor in suicide (Greening & Stoppelbein, 2002; Pfeffer, 1997). The first development of depression of adults can mostly be tracked in mid and late adolescence (Park, 2006). The prevalence of depression is very low in children under the age of 12, but abruptly increases in adolescence (Kim, 2008). Based on the study results showing that about 30% of patients diagnosed with depression committed suicide, about 66% of adolescents who attempted suicide were suffering from depression (Commission on Youth Protection, 2003), and more than 90% of the adolescents who committed suicide had symptoms of depression, depression is the most important single factor contributing to suicide (Lester & Miller, 1990).

Considering the abruptly increasing incidence of depression and impulsive features of adolescence (Lee, 2003), suicide in adolescence is not a problem of some adolescents, but rather a social

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82 53 810 2886; fax: +82 53 810 4780.
E-mail address: pinakim@ynu.ac.kr (G.S. Kim).

¹ Tel.: +82 10 9070 8919; fax: +82 53 810 4780.

issue experienced by many adolescents. The suicidal ideation of adolescents can be used for predicting future suicidal behaviors. Therefore, attention should be focused on adolescent suicide, and the causes of suicide and risky group behavior should be screened before offering counseling and treatment.

A psychological test is a kind of self-report using language to assess the risk of suicide, but it can draw unwelcome attention of subjects who may distort or conceal their internal intentions. By comparison, a drawing test is widely used due to its less threatening approach in assessing complicated and delicate psychological states, despite some limitations in expressing unconsciousness and emotions (Sin, 2003). In addition, the inner world can be projected during the drawing test with less defensiveness or distortion, and the results of interpretation on personality or personal problems are drawn without limitation (Choi, 2004). Moreover, the drawing test is useful for exploring the state, cause, and method of treatment for the symptoms of maladjustments through the behavioral and artwork processes (Jeong, 2003).

Consequently, validation studies on the drawing test that can be used for diagnosing the mental health of adolescents are being actively conducted. In Korean studies on suicide, the free drawing (Ann, 2009), tree-drawing (Jeong, 2009) and bridge drawing (Heo & Jue, 2010) tests were used in relation to studies on adolescents suicidal ideation as complementary methods to compensate for the weakness of the language test.

Projective tests using drawings to overcome the weakness of a questionnaire can be used to assess internalized problems that are hardly screened through rating scale. As a projective drawing test, Draw-a-Story (DAS) assessment is known to be useful for assessing depression and aggressiveness which can harm other people or the patients themselves. DAS assessment helps subjects who are experiencing difficulty drawing a picture using stimulus drawings.

DAS assessment was introduced in 1988 and has been developed by many clinicians including Silver. DAS assessment was developed from drawing from imagination, which is one of the 3 subtests of the Silver Drawing Test. In the results of the drawing from imagination subtest, some children drew suicide, death, extermination or bleak images. DAS assessment was developed to attempt to assess concealed depression of children, which can be a response of death or violence (Silver, 1983, 1990, 1996, 2002).

DAS assessment was originally developed as a tool for screening depressive children and adolescents. Through the following studies, DAS task was used to assess the self-image of adolescents (Silver & Ellison, 1995), screening adolescent sex-offenders (Brandt, 1995), and screening children and adolescents suffering from depression and suicidal impulses (Wilson, 1990). From the study of DAS assessment in Korea with regard to depression of elementary school students (Cho, 2011), middle school students (Yun, 2006; Sohn & Kim, 2008b), depressive females (Jung & Jue, 2005) and job seekers (Kim, 2010), the validity of DAS as an assessment tool for measuring depression was confirmed.

DAS assessment was previously used mainly for measuring depression, but was confirmed to be useful for assessing masked depression and aggression among children by investigating the correlation between depression and aggressiveness (Silver, 1988a; Earwood, Fedorko, Holzman, Montanari, & Silver, 2004). The application of DAS as a tool for assessing anger has also been suggested (Jue, 2011). Studies conducted by Kim (2008) and Sohn and Kim (2008a) confirmed the capability of DAS assessment to explain depression and aggressiveness of adolescents. In addition, a vagueness limitation of the 5 points in the self-image scale was pointed out, and the positive and negative factors involved in the 5 points in the self-image scale were suggested to be differentiated from each other.

As shown, DAS assessment has been used for verifying the correlation between depression and aggression among children and

Table 1

Distribution by gender and grade.

	7th	8th	9th	Total
Male	75	58	61	194
Female	66	80	73	219
Total	141	138	134	413

adolescents, and for treating depression and masked depression. The only study on the characteristics of the DAS test response according to depression and suicidal ideation of soldiers, which was used for differentiating self-destructive aggression, was conducted by Kim (2009a, 2009b). Silver reported that the DAS test response can reflect the attitudes of the subjects themselves and other people, and can be used as a predictor of destructive behaviors and self-injurious behaviors. In addition, Silver reported that clinical assessment is mandatory for the DAS test response that received 1 point from both the emotional content scale and the self-image scale (Silver, 2005). This means that DAS can be used for assessing not only 'self-images that harm others' but also 'self-destructive aggressiveness that harms the subject.'

Therefore, the validity of DAS assessment for predicting suicidal risk is tested in the present study through DAS task and suicidal risk rating scale targeting early adolescent middle school students who show an abrupt increase in emotional and behavioral problems due to the competitive learning environment and school violence.

Method

Participants

Male and female students attending 6 middle schools in a large urban city (Busan) of South Korea participated in the experiments. Out of 448 collected questionnaires and drawing test papers, 413 sets were finally used for the study after the exclusion of 35 inadequate sets. Compositions of 7th, 8th and 9th grades of middle school students were 34.1%, 33.4% and 32.4%, respectively, and those of male and female students were 47% and 53%, respectively. Distribution by gender and grade is shown in Table 1.

Procedures

The tests for this study were conducted at 6 middle schools in a large urban city (Busan) of South Korea between May 8, 2011 and December 28, 2011 upon obtaining permission from the schools. A relationship was evident between DAS assessment and the suicidal risk predictors in the small art therapy group suffering from intimidation, depression or difficulties in friendship. Accordingly, DAS assessment and a suicidal risk predictor test were conducted for 6 small groups and classes. In order to reduce the aversion to questionnaires, and to help emotional release, a suicidal risk predictor test was conducted after the DAS task. Since the story contents are more important than the drawing characteristics in the DAS task, stories provided by the subjects and the concealed meanings were arranged to be revealed clearly by adding a supportive questionnaire in order to minimize insincere or blank answers and overcome limitations of a group test (Sohn, 2008).

Instruments

Draw-a-Story (DAS)

The DAS assessment, which was developed for assessing children and adolescents who are at risk of aggressiveness and

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