FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE JUVENILE NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS' PSYCHOSOCIAL ADAPTATION TO SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract- The objective of this study is to examine the levels and influence of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and adaptation to South Korean society among juvenile North Korean defectors in order to identify the factors influencing young North Korean defectors' psychosocial adaptation to South Korea. The participants of this study were North Korean defectors aged between 9 and 24 years, who are defined as "juveniles" under Korea's *Framework Act on Juveniles*. A questionnaire survey was conducted at alternative schools and local counseling centers in communities where North Korean defectors are concentrated and 170 questionnaires were collected. The score of the participants' psychosocial adaptation to South Korea was at an average level, at 1.5 points out of 3. Among the sub-areas of assessment, the score for aggressiveness was significantly high, which indicates that an intervention for mitigating the aggressiveness of juvenile North Korean defectors is necessary. Women (rather than men) and elementary school children (rather than college students) showed lower levels of psychosocial adaptation to South Korean society. The level of juvenile North Korean defectors' psychosocial adaptation to South Korean society showed a statistically significant positive correlation with posttraumatic stress symptoms, enculturation stress, and anxiety about an uncertain future. The more posttraumatic symptoms they showed and the higher level of stress they experienced in adjusting to the new culture, the greater was their anxiety about an uncertain future and the less successful they were in adapting to South Korea. On the contrary, psychosocial adaptation to South Korea demonstrated a statistically significant negative correlation with emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and satisfaction with peer relationships. The higher the emotional intelligence and self-esteem were, the more satisfied they were with their relationship with friends and the more successful they were in adjusting to South Korea. Finally, the variables that affect juvenile North Korean defectors' psychosocial adaptation to South Korea the most were posttraumatic stress symptoms and enculturation stress. These two variables account for 49.1% of the participants' psychosocial adaptation. This result indicates the need for developing comprehensive programs to help juvenile North Korean defectors successfully adapt to South Korea, as well as local communities and government agencies' efforts to help them grow into Korean citizens who can contribute to South Korean society.

I. NECESSITIES OF THE STUDY

With the trend of an increasing number of North Korean defectors entering the South with their families, the proportion of young North Korean defectors has also been increasing. The number of North Korean defectors aged between 10 and 19 years was 3,436 and the number of young North Korean defectors aged between 20 and 29 years was 8,236, which accounted for approximately 40% of all North Korean defectors entering the South (according to the UNHCR, in 2010, 44% of refugees worldwide were children and teenagers aged 18 or younger, which is close to the ratio of children and teenaged North Korean defectors in South Korea).

Adolescence is the time when children develop their self-identity and prepare for their adulthood, while going through many physical and mental changes and growth. As children and teenagers who have defected from North Korea undergo numerous traumatic experiences such as threats to their safety, separation from family members, and the fear of being sent back to the North in the process of trying to enter the South, their growth and development as well as their adaptation to South Korean society are substantially affected. Negative experiences during the emotionally sensitive period of adolescence makes young North Korean defectors experience anxiety, a sense of inferiority, and identity crises in the process of adjusting to South Korean society. Notably, if their depression and anxiety continue, they might end up failing entirely to adapt to South Korean society (Kim, Park & Park, 2014). In addition, young North Korean defectors have different problems, depending on their personal background, motive for defecting from North Korea, period and experience of staying in a new country, and existence of family members. Some of them, who have failed to adapt due to differences in the education system between the North and South, unstable family structures, and negative prejudices against North Korean defectors in South Korea, end up being embroiled in violence and delinquency (Park, 2009). This might lead to identity crises, cultural stress, academic underperformance, failure in society, and so on among young North Korean defectors. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the psychological and social factors of the lives of young North Korean defectors in order to help them grow into healthy members of South Korean society; one of the most important factors in helping them successfully adapt to South Korea is fostering their self-esteem. Self-esteem has been reported as a factor that affects children and teenagers' stress levels and their school adaptive ability (Park, 2015). The most significant determinant factor for children and teenagers' self-esteem is emotional intelligence. It also positively explains social efficacy (Cheung, Cheung & Hue, 2015). Social intelligence is an important factor that helps understanding and

predicting a person's adaptation to diverse elements of everyday life, psychological health, effective leadership skills, satisfaction with life, creativity, professional success, physical health, etc. (Kim & Han, 2011). The objective of this study is to examine the levels and influence of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and adaptation to South Korean society among juvenile North Korean defectors in order to identify the factors influencing young North Korean defectors' psychosocial adaptation to South Korea. This will help them develop sound self-esteem and emotional intelligence, as well as explore ways to successfully adapt to South Korean society. Therefore, this study examines the level of emotional intelligence, self-esteem, enculturation stress, post-traumatic symptoms, and psychosocial adaptation of young North Korean defectors in South Korea and identifies the influence of those factors on their psychosocial adaptation to South Korea, for the purpose of helping them adjust to South Korean society and providing basic reference data for the establishment of plans to help improve their self-esteem and emotions.

II. RESULTS

Variables	Categories	n	%	Psychosocial Adaptation Mean ± SD	t/F (p)
Gender	Male	55	32.4	76.20±15.72	-2.054 (.043)
	Female	115	67.6	81.46±15.42	
Age (years)	14–17	36	21.2	76.17±16.51	1.326 (.268)
	18 21	84	49.4	81.24±15.45	
	>22	50	29.4	79.86±15.31	
	Mean ± SD	19.92 ± 2.77			
Time period taken from defecting from the North to entering the South(years)	Less than 1 year	83	48.8	78.74±15.47	0.465 (.629)
	1–3 years	73	42.9	80.86±15.47	
	Over 4 years	13	7.6	77.69±16.88	
	[range: less than 1 year to 19 years]	1.62±2.66			
Time period of staying in the South (years)	Less than 1 year	87	51.2	80.03±15.54	0.387 (.680)
	1–3 years	60	35.3	80.12±16.05	
	Over 4 years	22	12.9	76.91±15.52	
	[range: less than 1 year to 13 years]	1.27±2.98			
Education level (North Korea)	No opportunity	19	11.2	73.58±16.40	1.219 (.305)
	Elementary school	43	25.3	81.23±14.84	
	Middle-High school	97	57.1	80.49±16.18	
	≥ College	11	6.5	78.27±11.71	
Current status of schooling	Elementary school	3	1.8	98.67±2.51a	2.559 (.029) a>b
	Middle school	13	7.6	80.62±18.35	
	High school	19	11.2	85.90±17.38	
	College	17	10.0	75.24±15.8b	
	Alternative school	72	42.4	76.82±15.49	
	Preparing for qualification exams or getting a job	46	27.1	82.02±13.31	
People living together	Parent(s)	91	53.5	77.51±16.14	1.529 (.196)
	Alone	55	32.4	82.66±13.64	
	Friend or supporter	18	10.6	82.00±18.03	
	Siblings or Relatives	6	3.5	84.60±15.82	

1. General Characteristics of the Participants

	Categories	Mean ± SD/Scale	Mean ± SD	Range
Emotional intelligence (40) developed by Moon	Emotional awareness and expression (8)	3.41±0.41	27.28±3.29	19.0 ~ 37.0
	Understanding others' emotions (8)	3.62±0.50	28.94±4.01	19.0 ~ 40.0
	Promotion of thinking (8)	3.59±0.46	28.71±3.72	21.0 ~ 38.0
	Utilization of emotional knowledge (8)	3.46±0.41	27.69±3.26	19.0 ~ 37.0

Yong-rin et al. (1999)	Emotional control (8)	2.97±0.57	23.79±4.52	8.0 ~ 37.0
	Total	3.41±0.29	136.41±11.76	102.0 ~ 169.0
Self-esteem (10) developed by Rosenberg (1965)		2.83±0.44	28.26±4.36	18.0 ~ 39.0
PDS (23) developed by Kim, Kim, Cho, Kim,,&. (2009)	Re-experience of trauma (5)	1.96±0.73	9.79±3.63	5.0 ~ 20.0
	Evasion/paralysis (7)	1.84±0.64	12.85±4.45	7.0 ~ 26.0
	Hyperarousal (5)	1.92±0.77	9.61±3.83	5.0 ~ 20.0
	Complex PTSD (6)	1.83±0.75	10.99±4.50	6.0 ~ 24.0
	Total	1.88±0.64	43.24±14.79	23.0 ~ 86.0
Enculturation stress (16) developed by Kim et al. (2009)	Sense of difference (4)	2.31±0.87	9.23±3.48	4.0 ~ 20.0
	Perceived discrimination (3)	2.27±0.84	6.82±2.52	3.0 ~ 13.0
	Cultural shock (3)	2.59±0.98	7.77±2.95	3.0 ~ 15.0
	Homesickness (3)	2.87±1.13	8.62±3.39	3.0 ~ 15.0
	Marginalization (3)	2.10±0.82	3.65±0.66	1.0 ~ 5.0
	Total	2.42±0.76	38.76±12.09	16.0 ~ 65.0
			total score	N(%)
	No problem with cultural adaptation		<33	47 (27.6)
	Potentially risky group		33–42	46 (27.1)
	High risk group		≥43	77 (45.3)
Psychosocial adaptation (52) : The Korean version of the youth self-behavioral assessment scale (K YSR)	Intimidation (7)	1.70 ± 0.42	11.91 ± 2.97	7.0 ~ 21.0
	Depression/anxiety (15)	1.66 ± 0.41	24.89 ± 6.21	15.0 ~ 43.0
	Delinquent behavior (11)	1.37 ± 0.30	15.09 ± 3.31	11.0 ~ 27.0
	Aggressiveness (19)	2.53 ± 0.55	27.87 ± 6.07	19.0 ~ 50.0
	Total	1.53 ± 0.30	79.76 ± 15.67	52.0 ~ 125.0
Others	Satisfaction with peer relationship		7.48 ± 2.00	0.0 ~ 10.0
	Academic stress		6.09 ± 2.57	0.0 ~ 10.0
	Anxiety about uncertain future		5.98 ± 2.35	0.0 ~ 10.0

2. Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, Enculturation Stress, and Psychosocial Adaptation

	Emotional intelligence	Self-esteem	Posttraumatic stress symptoms	Enculturation stress	Psychosocial adaptation	Satisfaction with peer relationship	Academic stress	Anxiety about uncertain future
				r(*p*)				
Emotional intelligence	1							
Self-esteem	.447 (<.001)	1						
Posttraumatic stress symptoms	-.137 (.074)	-.415 (<.001)	1					
Enculturation stress	-.270 (<.001)	-.312 (<.001)	.525 (<.001)	1				
Psychosocial adaptation	-.282 (<.001)	-.407 (<.001)	.605 (<.001)	.576 (<.001)	1			
Satisfaction with peer relationship	.235 (.002)	.234 (.002)	-.238 (.002)	-.258 (.001)	-.220 (.004)	1		
Academic stress	-.004 (.963)	-.012 (.881)	.198 (.010)	.236 (.002)	.142 (.065)	.068 (.380)	1	
Anxiety about uncertain future	-.067 (.386)	-.110 (.153)	.244 (.001)	.262 (.001)	.234 (.002)	-.038 (.621)	.687 (<.001)	1

3. Correlation between Psychosocial Adaptation and Other Variables

Independent variable	B	β	t	p	F	p	R^2	Adj. R^2
Posttraumatic stress symptoms (PDS)	.391	.369	5.195	<.001	22.312	<.001	.491	.469
Enculturation stress	.386	.298	4.280	<.001				

Table 4. Factors affecting the psychosocial adaptation of North Korean Adolescents (N = 170)

CONCLUSION

Even though the result of this study cannot be generalized, as it was conducted on not all juvenile North Korean defectors, it is still meaningful as basic reference data to help provide young North Korean defectors in South with proper services to improve their psychosocial adaptation to South Korean society. As suggested by the results of the study, for young North Korean defectors to settle down and live stably in the South, posttraumatic stress symptoms need to be alleviated; they also need to quickly adjust themselves to the culture of South Korea. Our society will also have to offer individual, in-depth counseling to them, so that the possibility of posttraumatic stress symptoms due to undergoing the suffering and pain experienced in the process of defecting from the North and entering the South are properly dealt with, and such traumatic experiences are not repeated in the lives of young North Korean defectors. Many of the hardships that defectors or refugees face, such as a sense of being different and culture shock, are related to enculturation stress. The results of this study demonstrate that more than 45% of young North Korean defectors in South Korea fall under the high-risk group, as far as enculturation stress is concerned. It has been almost seven decades since the separation of South and North Korea. Consequently, there are great differences in the lifestyle, everyday experiences, and emotions of the people from the South and North, who have lived under different systems and ideologies for a long time despite the same ethnic roots. That is why North Korean defectors in South Korea see themselves more as refugees than as Korean people, and they feel a sense of difference (Kim, 2015). Therefore, to prevent juvenile North Korean defectors from seeing themselves as strangers and ending up as marginalized people in South Korean society, they will have to be given opportunities to learn South Korea's culture naturally in their daily lives, and not by fragmentary and one-off education programs. In order to achieve such a goal, changes in the awareness of the South Korean people are essential. In addition, the results of this study demonstrated the fact that a high proportion of young North Korean defectors in South Korea are out of school and are preparing for employment. For young North Korean defectors who are enrolled in school, adaptation programs are provided more actively and in diverse forms; however, such programs are not available for those who are preparing for employment while not attending school. Therefore, a more systematic approach is necessary for designing programs that can assist young North Korean defectors psychosocially adapt to South Korean society. Local communities and government agencies will also have to make efforts to help them grow into healthy members of our society, who can contribute to our society.

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