

Issues and Problems of Adaptation of North Korean Defectors to South Korean Society: An In-depth Interview Study with 32 Defectors

Woo Taek Jeon

Abstract

The number of North Koreans defecting to South Korea is increasing rapidly. They are important people to South Korean society not only for humanitarian reasons, but also for their impact on the future Korean unification and the integration of the two different South and North Korean peoples. However, the defectors have experienced many difficulties in their adaptation to South Korean society due to their own characteristics and due to the misunderstandings of the South Korean people. To obtain comprehensive qualitative data about the characteristics and difficulties of North Korean defectors' adaptation to South Korean society, 58 semi-structured in-depth interviews were performed with 32 defectors who had entered South Korea from 1990 to 1997. Four categories of adaptation difficulties were encountered, which are related with the defectors' suspiciousness, different ways of thinking, searching for new sets of values, and with the prejudice of the South Korean people. Finally, three areas of suggestions for the more successful adaptation of the defectors to South Korean society were made; a need for more comprehensive perspectives on the defectors' adaptation, suggestions regarding educational programs and suggestions for educating the South Korean people.

Key Words: Defector, refugee, North Korea, adaptation

INTRODUCTION

The Korean people have existed as a single ethnic group for over 2000 years and have lived under a single nation-state for more than 1300 years. Following the arbitrary division of Korea at the end of World War II, South Korea has evolved into a capitalistic industrial society with an open door policy towards foreign countries. By contrast, North Korea has remained a closed society, whose highly refined communist ideology is centered on a single absolute leader. In addition to these ideological differences, the Korean War (1950–1953) caused tremendous suffering among the Korean people and fostered a strong sense of suspicion between the North and South Koreans. This suspicion has been maintained by the complete lack of public and private communications for more than 50 years, even for family reunions or

academic research. Despite possessing a common history, language, culture, and set of customs, the prolonged separation and ideological division of the Korean peninsula has gradually produced two different peoples. As a result, just like Germany or Vietnam,¹⁻³ one of the main obstacles to unification has been the difference growing between the two peoples. It been almost impossible for North Korean people to move to South Korea because of the tight restrictions placed on them by the North Korean government. However, the number of defectors has begun to increase with North Korea's recent economic and political difficulties and famine. Although there have been sporadic North Korean defectors since 1945, their number has been very small. There were 59 defectors from 1971 until 1980; 63 from 1981 until 1990. In the 90's, there were 9 in 1991, 8 in 1992, and 8 in 1993. However since 1994, the number has rapidly increased. There were 52 defectors in 1994, 41 in 1995, 56 in 1996, 85 in 1997, 71 in 1998, and 148 in 1999.⁴ In addition, many more defectors are currently residing in China and Russia hoping to eventually come to South Korea. Although estimated at between 2,000–320,000 by the South Korean government,⁴ many NGOs involved with North

Received February 14, 2000

Accepted March 31, 2000

Department of Psychiatry, Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul, Korea.

Address reprint request to Dr. W. T. Jeon, Department of Psychiatry, Yonsei University College of Medicine, C.P.O. Box 8044, Seoul 120-752, Korea. Tel: 82-2-361-5480, Fax: 82-2-313-0891, E-mail: wrjeon@yumc.yonsei.ac.kr

Korea and North Korean defectors estimate the actual figure as being between 100,000 and 500,000.

Considering the total population of North Korea is 22 million, the number of defectors is indeed very small. But they are important for the following reasons. Firstly, there is the possibility that the number of defectors will increase rapidly over a short period of time if the famine and the economic crisis in North Korea continue. Even though the North Koreans in China are not officially allowed to enter South Korea, many try hard to do so. In the event of legal changes allowing their immigration, the number will increase dramatically. Secondly, to the South Koreans, these defectors are uniquely valuable to the future Korean unification, as the defectors are the first and only North Korean people whom they can meet directly and live with. Through these limited experiences, South Koreans form opinions and impressions about the general North Korean population and unification. For example, if South Korean people form an impression that North Korean defectors can adapt to South Korean society successfully and that they are good for South Korean society, their attitude to unification will be more positive. But if they do not form a good impression, that will be connected with a South Korean negative opinion about all North Korean people and unification. Thirdly, to the North Koreans, the defectors are important because North Koreans are reportedly very sensitive to rumors about how the defectors are treated by the South Korean government and how the defectors adjust to the capitalistic South Korean society. Hence the life and adaptation of defectors in South Korea may influence the attitude of North Korean people to South Korea and unification. Fourthly, the interactions between the defectors and the South Korean people will help predict the future interactions between the North and South Korean peoples following unification. Although the defectors do not represent the North Korean population, they are the only subjects available for research.

There have been many immigrants and refugees in the world who leave their hometown and mother land and adjust to new places.⁵ Studies of such groups have reported that even though their social situations are different, they have many common difficulties in their adaptation.⁶⁻⁹ But at the same time, it has been pointed out that one of the most common misunderstandings about refugees is that they are considered to be one group with the same characteristics and

abilities. But the fact is that refugees are very heterogeneous people consisting of differences in age, gender, personal history, trauma history, mental status, ability and characteristics.¹⁰⁻¹⁴ So understanding the difference and diversity of North Korean defectors is important.

There have been several studies regarding the adaptation of North Korean defectors to South Korean society.¹⁵⁻²² But most of these studies possess the following shortcomings. Firstly, most of these studies focus on obtaining basic statistical data on the defectors and thus obtain only superficial information. Secondly, the defectors are usually very suspicious towards other people and reluctant to openly express their opinions or describe their personal situations. Mail surveys or simply structured interviews have yielded poor and stereotypical results without gaining exact or comprehensive information. This has led to difficulties between the defectors and the South Korean government. Despite providing financial assistance, housing, and job placement, the government has been the target of criticism by the defectors. And there have been difficulties and misunderstandings between the defectors and the South Korean people, too. With the presence of these problems, a comprehensive understanding of the defectors is necessary.

The twin purposes of this study are firstly, to obtain qualitative data about the defectors' adaptation to South Korean society through which a comprehensive understanding of the defectors and their life can be made, and secondly, to make some practical suggestions to facilitate the defectors' successful adaptation to South Korean society in the future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Any attempt to study North Korean defectors is inherently difficult. Even though they live freely in South Korea without invasive surveillance, the political and military tension between South and North Korea and defectors' own experiences in North Korea make them very cautious and suspicious in their behavior. Usually they are reluctant to talk about themselves to others, as they fear that they are under suspicion and surveillance by the South Korean government. Some defectors frequently change their phone numbers to avoid contacts with other people. This is one reason why questionnaires and superficial inter-

views have had little success. In view of these difficulties, in-depth interviews were designed and prepared for this research, in the following manner:

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were held from October 1995 to June 1997. The subjects were selected from the defectors who had entered South Korea from 1990 to 1997. No limitations were placed on the basis of age, gender, education, social status, or escape route. Because of the characteristics of the defectors, no random sampling was possible. 3 methods were utilized in finding subjects. Firstly, in a variant of the Snowball method,²³ new defectors were approached with the help and introduction of previously interviewed defectors or others who had a close relationship with them. As the researcher was introduced as someone who was not a government agent, the defectors believed that the researcher was a reliable individual to whom they could speak frankly. 28 out of the total 32 subjects (87.5%) were contacted via this method. Secondly, the remaining 4 defectors (12.5%) voluntarily contacted the researcher wanting to receive some help for their physical problems. In no cases were interviews conducted in the presence of government officials.

To obtain more accurate data in the interviews, the following methods were utilized.

First, prior to the interviews, the researcher tried to establish a personal relationship with the defectors and make them feel comfortable. Engaging in small talk and providing personal data on his own background, the researcher then fully explained the purpose of his study and informed them that some good might come out of their difficulties if they participated in this "important study". Emphasizing that honesty is the most critical factor in this study, the researcher solicited the subject's voluntary participation.

Second, the researcher agreed not to disclose their identity and certain interview contents, which they wished to keep confidential.

Third, all defectors were very reluctant to sign the informed consent paper because of their concerns regarding their anonymity. In this regard, the researcher agreed to accept oral informed consent.

Fourth, the defectors were reluctant to be tape recorded or video taped. Thus, the researcher wrote only brief notes during the interviews and wrote a full record afterwards which included some quotations and observations.

Fifth, before the interviews, the researcher stated that if the subjects felt uncomfortable or found the questions difficult to answer, they did not have to answer the questions. And the questions were not structured and were usually open-ended.

Sixth, the researcher tried to have more than one interview with each subject, making the interviews more comfortable and intimate. When there were some questions that were difficult to answer immediately, the questions were moved to the next interview and an answer was not forced in that session.

Although the interviews were not structured, four key questions were included in each interview:

1. How did you live in South Korea? 2. What have been the difficulties in your life in South Korea? 3. How did you live in North Korea? 4. How did you defect from North Korea and enter South Korea?

Because their previous lives in North Korea are sensitive issues to the defectors, they were usually asked such questions in the latter part of the interviews. However, the order of the questions varied and certain questions were added based on the attitude of the subjects and the subjects' responses.

RESULTS

Demographic data

The interviews were conducted between October 1995 and June 1997 with a total of 32 subjects in 58 interviews. The range in the number of interviews per person was 1-4 and the mean frequency of interviews per person was 1.81. Each interview session lasted between 2 and 5 hours (average 3.4 hours). 28 subjects were male and 4 subjects were female. The age range was 15 to 63 with a mean age of 35.1 years (SD 8.5). Some important demographic and socioeconomic data from within the three major periods in the defectors' lives are as follows;

Life in North Korea-Highest level of education attained: 4 attained elementary school education, 8 attained middle and high school education, 8 enrolled in professional engineering school, 9 in college, and 3 in graduate school. **Occupation:** 12 laborers, 8 students, 5 public officials, 4 professional workers, and 3 others. 14 were members of the North Korean communist party while 18 were not. 12 had served in the army and 20 did not.

Defection-22 defected alone while 10 defected with their families: 1 defected in 1990, 1 in 1991, 1 in 1992, 3 in 1993, 7 in 1994, 8 in 1995, 6 in 1996, and 5 in 1997. 22 defected via China, and 10 via other countries such as Russia. The defectors did not wish to express or have reported their reasons for defection. But these included having a suspect family background or origin which limited their opportunities in the North, a family member being placed in a concentration camp, a difficult relationship with a workplace superior, etc.

Life in South Korea-Occupation: 5 laborers, 4 office workers, 9 students; 2 professional workers, 2 business owners, 2 housewives, and 8 unemployed. 17 have attended religious meetings (12 Christianity, 3 Catholic, and 2 Buddhism) while 15 have not.

Adaptation difficulties

Adaptation difficulties related to the defectors' suspiciousness: One of the most striking characteristics of the defectors is their suspicious attitude towards outsiders. There are three problems associated with this characteristic.

First, personal loneliness and difficulties in becoming acquainted with others. When the subjects were asked what is the most difficult thing in their life in South Korea, the most common answer was loneliness (21 defectors, 65%). The defectors stated that it is difficult for them to get close to South Korean people because of their low economic status, cultural differences, and a lack of assurances that they would be accepted. Many defectors (11 subjects, 34.3%) said that it is difficult for them to make friends among other defectors because of their suspiciousness towards each other or because of ideological and political differences.

Second, a tendency not to live together in groups. North Korean defectors who escaped by themselves without their family and lived in South Korea by themselves were suspicious of living together with other defectors. This makes their present life more lonely and difficult. In this study, no subject lived with any other defectors. The reasons for this are as follows: 1) Some subjects pointed out that the other defectors might be North Korean agents (4 subjects, 12.5%). 2) The subjects were concerned that the other defectors might inform personal details of their lives to the South Korean government (7 subjects,

21.8%). 3) Some of the subjects who defected alone are generally inclined towards solving problems alone (3 subjects, 9.3%).

Third, refusing to become involved with their sponsors' family. One method used to facilitate the defectors' adaptation to South Korean society is to have the defectors become involved with their sponsors' and their families. Indeed, many South Korean sponsors have volunteered to open their homes to the defectors. However, in this study, out of 22 subjects who defected alone, all but one refused to live with their sponsors, instead choosing to live alone. The reasons for this are as follows: 1) In North Korea, the subjects had been forced to live collectively. Consequently, the subjects feel that the most important aspect of their life in South Korea is their enjoyment of individual freedom and thus they refuse to become involved in any social group. 2) Because they were continually under surveillance in North Korea, the defectors feared that their sponsors were watching them. 3) 6 subjects stated that they felt guilty about leaving their family and did not wish to betray their memory by joining a foster family.

Adaptation difficulties related to different ways of thinking: The subjects' way of thinking can be summarized into five areas.

First, the subjects thought in collective terms. Indeed, they declared that the most striking aspect of the South Korean people is their individualistic behavior and way of thinking (21 subjects, 65.6%). However, many subjects did not think that individualism was superior to collectivism (14 subjects, 43.7%). As stated by one adolescent defector:

"In clean-up time in North Korean schools, students who have finished their work earlier usually help others. But in South Korean schools, students who have finished their work earlier play together. At first, it was very strange to me"

Second, their indoctrination in North Korea has given the subjects a very rigid way of thinking, which views the world in black and white terms. In North Korea, the social and educational environment has taught people to respond in black and white terms. For example, they were taught that their leader Kim Il Sung was a perfect individual and that they should give him their absolute respect and obedience. At the same time, they were taught to hate the South Korean government and the US, which epitomizes all

that, is evil. Through these experiences, they have developed very dichotomic and paranoid ways of thinking; looking at any compromise as an act of cowardice. Some defectors' comments;

"I found it difficult to accept that people can possess different opinions or that things can be value-neutral"

"When I found that other defectors possess different political opinions about North Korea, I usually refused to accept these differences and simply discontinued the relationship with those defectors. I believe this is right".

Third, the subjects were ambivalent towards the concept of money (25 subjects, 78.1%). Taught in North Korea that money is the instrument of slavery in a capitalistic society and that it is the symbol of personal selfishness and evil, the subjects have an ambivalent attitude towards money. As stated by one defector:

"I do not want to be a slave to money. But at the same time, I desperately need money to live in this society. At first, when I received money after my first anti-communism lecture in South Korea, I felt insulted; because in North Korea, a lecture could not be regarded as labor and I did that from my heart. But if I take money, it looks like I am only speaking for financial gain"

Fourth, the defectors have strong expectations about the financial support given to them by the South Korean government. But they stated that the financial support they receive is not sufficient and smaller than what they had expected (19, defectors, 60%). Until 1993, the South Korean government gave relatively large amounts of financial support to the defectors (average 30,800 US dollars). But since 1994, as the number of defectors increased rapidly, the financial support was dramatically reduced (average 12,500 US dollars).^{18,21} In response, the defectors have complained as follows: 1) Their financial difficulties and their problems in finding a job have made them more sensitive to this issue (23 subjects, 71.8%). 2) In North Korea, they were taught that egalitarianism is the most important aspect of social justice and were angry at the fact that the South Korean government does not treat defectors equally (21 subjects, 65.6%). 3) Suspicious that they were receiving less than their fellows, the defectors would constantly seek to compare with each other the amount of financial support given to them by the South Korean

government (15 subjects, 46.8%).

Fifth, there were adaptation difficulties related to their sponsors as follows: 1) Some subjects (6 defectors, 19%) stated that they were embarrassed when they heard that their sponsor would give them monthly financial support. Although for their sponsors, that was the most important aspect of their relationship, the defectors felt that this degraded their relationship to one based on money. 2) The subjects misunderstood the nature of religions in South Korea (8 defectors, 25%). In the south, most sponsors come from religious organizations. However, not fully understanding the situation in the north, the sponsors encouraged the defectors to regularly attend church sessions. Taught in the north that religion is evil and exploitative, the defectors felt that they were being forced to attend church and were reminded of the ideological indoctrination sessions in the north. This put considerable strain on the relationship between the defectors and their sponsors.

Adaptation difficulties related to the prejudice of the South Korean society: This study has shown that the subjects believe that the South Korean people have prejudice against them. These impressions and prejudices are the cause of mutual misunderstandings and adaptation problems. The prejudices which defectors thought that the South Korean people have toward them are as follows:

"Because defectors abandoned their family in North Korea, they will not be warm-hearted and will not pay much attention to their family"; Most of the subjects defected without their families (22 defectors, 69%) and many of them could not even inform their families of their intention to defect (14 defectors, 44%). Knowing that their families would suffer because of their defection, the subjects' sense of guilt was so strong that most do not even wish to talk about their family. As stated by one defector:

"I have one recurring nightmare. I return to North Korea and visit my home. But my parents are not there. At that moment, my younger sister comes to me and ushers me into a strange room. Inside, there is a white cloth, which covers the dead bodies of my parents. My sister tells me that the North Korean government killed them due to my defection. I cry bitterly and awake to find myself wet with tears".

But the defectors also realize that the South Korean people look down on them because they abandoned their families. That causes deep anguish for them.

However, to some defectors, this guilty feeling plays a role in setting goals for their lives in South Korea. Those subjects stated that they were willing to work hard to make money with which they could help their families following unification. But at the same time, this sense of guilt can also cause psychological problems and self-destructive behavior such as persistent anxiety (22 defectors, 69%), depressed moods (15 defectors, 47%), insomnia (11 defectors, 34%), excessive alcohol drinking (9 defectors, 28.1%), recurrent nightmares (7 defectors, 22%), feelings of chest tightness (4 defectors, 13%) and back pain (4 defectors, 13%).

"Because the defectors were educated in North Korea and escaped, they must either be extremely pro-Communist or extremely anti-Communist"; Indeed, the defectors were strongly indoctrinated with communist ideology. However, many subjects stated that the North Korean people are not so concerned about ideology. As absolute obedience to ideology is more important than its content, the subjects (11 subjects, 34.7%) have stated that ideology was only a "survival tool" to them that is kept far from the people's daily lives and understandings. The subjects defected from the north not because they were anti-Communist but because of personal problems which made their lives difficult under the North Korean regime. And although they detest Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jung-Il, that does not mean that they are anti-Communist. The defectors' experiences of living and being educated in a communist country seem to be related with their difficulty in adapting to a capitalistic society.

"Because North Korea is a collectivistic society, defectors will have a high aptitude for collective behavior"; It is true that the North Korean people live extremely collectivistic and organized lives under the slogan of "All for one, One for all". But in the south, the subjects did not want to live with other defectors or their South Korean sponsors because of their personal suspiciousness. This shows that the tension, stress, and suspiciousness of the North Korean defectors are very strong and cause considerable difficulties in their lives in South Korea.

"Because North Korea is a very underdeveloped communist country and South Korea is a developed capitalistic society, the defectors will be unable to make money and will be completely dependent on their sponsors and the South Korean government"; It is true that, at first, most defectors

have a difficulty in finding a job because their skills and education in North Korea are not suited for their new jobs in the south. However, many defectors displayed considerable aptitude in learning new skills and techniques. Others showed a high aptitude for making money in the south. In this regard, they were dependent on neither the government nor their sponsor. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the defectors possess varying levels of ability and aptitude towards making a living. And the programs for defectors such as job training or social education need to be individually differentiated according to the ability and aptitude of each defector.

"Because South and North Korean people are all Koreans from the same ethnic group and use the same language, the defectors and South Korean people can get along very easily without problems"; The subjects (7 subjects, 21.8%) complained that the South Korean people have too high expectations about the defectors' ability to assimilate to South Korean society. As stated by one defector:

"When South Korean people initially meet us, they are usually very curious about us and wonder how they should treat us. But once we become a little better acquainted, they usually ignore the fact that we were born in and lived in North Korea, and expect us to think and behave just like South Koreans".

Adaptation difficulties in finding a new set of values: Many defectors (14 defectors, 44%) said that they feel their lives in North Korea were worthless. Despite being taught in North Korea that Kim Il-Sung was a great leader, North Korea was a paradise, and North Koreans were the happiest people in the world, in south Korea, the defectors began to realize that they were deceived and their lives in North Korea were miserable and abnormal. Feeling confused, the subjects become skeptical about their social and political beliefs, the nature of human relationships in North Korea, and the meaning of their lives in North Korea.

But at the same time, this study, shows that the ability of the defectors to overcome their difficulties is dependent on their perception that their difficulties have some meaning. As stated by two subjects:

"Even though I defected from North Korea, I still believe in some of the ideas of communism. But we could not live according to those principles in the north. While in the south, I visited a religious community where volunteers were caring for thousands of

homeless and terminal patients very sincerely. I wept, thinking that this is the place which I had dreamed of in the north but which was never realized. I now want to send money to that religious community. Maybe I should work hard in order to do so".

"When I escaped from North Korea to a third country, I managed to arrive at the South Korean embassy. During my first night there, I saw a Bible for the first time. Reading it, I felt as if I had been struck by electricity. That made me think that there is another New World which I should learn about just as I had learned about the communist ideology".

It is thus important to recognize that the defectors are struggling to find for themselves a new sense of values. In this, religion plays an important role. Indeed, 17 subjects stated that they attend religious meetings regularly. But at the same time, most defectors stated that they feel uncomfortable towards religion, in particular its supernatural aspects, despite agreeing with its principle of loving others.

DISCUSSION

Attitude of defectors towards interviews

In spite of their suspiciousness at the beginning, most of the subjects were very serious and revealed their opinions openly and frankly to the researcher. Some even stated that; "I am saying to you something that I did not reveal to the South Korean government during its investigation". These attitudes seem to be based on the following reasons.

Firstly, the subjects were lonely so they wanted to have friends or people whom they could trust and speak to frankly. Secondly, they wanted some neutral or supportive advocates to speak on their behalf to the South Korean government and people. Thirdly, they wanted to contribute to Korean unification and realized that participating in this interview is meaningful for that contribution. Fourthly, the researcher's considerate and careful approach during the interview, which was designed to provide frank and honest support without arousing any suspicion, appeared to work. Though there are obvious difficulties, it is possible to approach defectors and gather data information with well-prepared and designed interview techniques.

Suggestions for more successful adaptation by the defectors

A need for more comprehensive perspectives on the defectors' adaptation: Previous studies regarding Indochinese refugees in western countries also revealed that their processes of adaptation have several stages and that those different aspects of their adaptation become more salient in different stages.²⁴⁻²⁸ This study showed that the North Korean defectors also experienced multi-wave trauma.

First wave-trauma occurred in North Korea, which was very severe and led to their decision to escape from North Korea, even at the risk of their lives. In addition, their decision to defect, along with their preparations in this regard, were also causes of considerable stress.

Second wave-trauma occurred during the period of defection. Their escape from North Korea was very dangerous, and many defectors crossed the Chino-Korean border by swimming or by walking on the frozen surface of the rivers at the border of the two nations. In China, these defectors were in danger because North Korean and Chinese security police were searching for them. Because of the diplomatic situation between South Korea and China, the defectors were unable to enter South Korea quickly or easily. Instead they had to hide and wait until they received permission to enter. Lasting from several weeks to several years, this period was difficult on the defectors.

Third wave-trauma occurred after entering South Korea. Upon their arrival, they were investigated by the South Korean government which caused a lot of tension to them. The defectors typically are restricted to a limited area under surveillance for several months. Although it was a period of hope, it was also a period of stress and anxiety.

Finally, the fourth wave-trauma occurred after they began to live in the South Korean society. Beginning with high expectations and joy, the defectors would soon confront all the financial problems and other difficulties associated with adaptation previously described in this study.

Even though the defectors experience multi-wave trauma and difficulties, the South Korean people and South Korean government typically do not pay much attention to the first three waves. Typically, they only concern themselves with the adaptation problems of

the defectors in the south. But the adaptation patterns and the defectors' attitudes regarding them are closely related with their previous life experiences. Therefore, in observing their characteristics, such as suspiciousness, we should consider their previous suffering and trauma. It is thus necessary that defectors should be viewed from a more comprehensive and multi-axial concept.

Suggestions regarding educational programs: This study showed that an educational program aiming at helping the defectors to prepare for their adaptation to South Korean society should be held during the South Korean government's inspection period.

First, helping the defectors to understand the capitalistic South Korean society. Guendelman²⁹ reported that refugees from Chile and Argentina who had been persecuted by the right-wing governments because of their left-wing ideology had difficulties in adapting to life in the United States. This situation can also be applied to the case of North Korean defectors. It is necessary to recognize that even though they defected from North Korea, they were educated in a very strong communism ideology and the influence of that education is still strong in their minds. And the defectors do not have much knowledge about South Korean society. Thus, they do not understand the working of life in a capitalistic system. Usually the defectors do not know why they have to work hard in the south in spite of seeing how wealthy it is compared to North Korea. Believing that equality is the most important social justice, they insist that no differences in compensation should be permitted and always compare their own income or level of financial support with that being received by the other defectors. Thus, education about capitalistic system is essential for their future work life and for their motivation to their job training.

Second, helping defectors acknowledge that there can be more than one opinion regarding a particular issue. To help defectors overcome their dichotomic thinking pattern, several methods which were found to be helpful in the interviews of this study can be proposed as follows: 1) Defector need to be helped to openly have individual and group conversations with other defectors and specialists regarding the relative strengths of North and South Korea in order to provide them with a sense of meaning regarding their lives in the north. This will not only help adjust their thinking pattern but also imbue them with a

new sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. 2) The defectors should be allowed an opportunity to discuss and decide some of the contents of their own educational program for themselves. To give them a sense of choice is critical to help them adapt to their future life.

Third, it is likely that the people with highly traumatized histories and symptoms of depression will have a great possibility of failing in their adaptation to the new society.^{13,14} Thus, screening out those vulnerable defectors during this period and intervening to help them should be one of the main program contents for this educational program. In this study, the researcher experienced that many defectors felt greatly relieved when they heard that their psychological and psychosomatic symptoms are a normal kind of response to an abnormal situation and that most other defectors also have similar problems.

Suggestions for educating the South Korean people: The findings of this study showed that there are several areas requiring the education of South Korean people.

First, there are problems related to South Koreans' over-expectations towards defectors' adaptation. As Murphy⁶ has noted, multicultural societies do not generally force individuals to change their ways of life, and usually have viable ethnic social support groups to assist individuals in the acculturation process. In contrast, monistic societies place more pressures on acculturation individuals to change their ways of life, and often don't provide social support for them. As in the north, the South Korean people live in a very monistic society. Thus, the South Korean people do not have a great deal of experience living together with those who are different. Because North Korean defectors speak the same language and are of the same ethnic background, most South Koreans assume that once the defectors arrive in the south, they will adapt to South Korean mannerisms and norms in every aspect easily. In this regard, the South Korean people do not acknowledge the unique characteristics, experiences, and thinking patterns of the defectors. This ignorance is the source of considerable stress between them and the defectors.

Second, South Koreans need to learn how to have frank discussions with the defectors. One of the typical characteristics of the defectors is their suspiciousness. People who deal with helping the defectors need to understand this characteristic and not respond

negatively to it. In this regard, the South Koreans should be trained to communicate with the defectors in a clear, frank, and simple manner in order to help alleviate the defectors' suspiciousness and prevent misunderstanding.

Third, it was reported that the prejudices and accompanying acts of discrimination of the host country people have a negative impact on the self-concept and mental health of traumatized refugees or victims.³⁰⁻³⁴ And previous studies about Vietnamese refugees have reported that the most difficult aspect of their lives was their sense of guilt about their remaining family in Vietnam and that their first wish was to meet their families.³⁵⁻³⁷ South Koreans need to overcome the prejudice, which the defectors stated that the South Koreans have towards them in their opinion.

Fourth, a preparatory educational program for sponsors is necessary. In this regard, sponsors need to learn the general psychological characteristics of the defectors as well as hear the experiences of other sponsors. Only the people who receive this education should be allowed to be sponsors.

Fifth, South Korean people need to learn to respect the defectors' previous lives in the north and not simply denounce it as meaningless and shameful. Recognizing and dealing with this problem will help the defectors attain a new sense of self-esteem.

Future research

Until now, very few things about the problems of adaptation of the North Korean defectors to the South Korean society have been known. Thus, the many findings of this study can be a starting point for future studies. The South Korean government already has started educational programs to help North Korean defectors adapt to South Korean society. The analysis of the experience of that program will be very informative and provide valuable data regarding the future integration of the North and South Korean people. And a longitudinal study about the defectors' adaptation to South Korean society and a study about the acculturation process of defectors will also be an important one for the future Korean unification. In the world like this, with conflicts and antagonisms so predominant, the trial and research of the integration and reconciliation of the two different Korean people could be one of the meaningful experiments for humankind.

REFERENCES

1. Maaz J. *Der Gefühlsstau*. Berlin: Argon Verlag; 1990.
2. Nguyen NC. *Vietnam under communism 1975-1982*. Hoover Institution, Stanford: Stanford University Press; 1983.
3. Shin G, Shin HW. *The Economic Unification of Germany*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press; 1992.
4. Board of Unification, Republic of Korea. *Annual Report of 1999*. Seoul: Board of Unification, Republic of Korea; 1999.
5. Weiner M. *The Global Migration Crisis Challenge to States and to Human Rights*. New York (NY): HarperCollins College Publishers; 1995.
6. Murphy HBM. Migration and the major mental disorders. A reappraisal. In: Kantor MB, editor. *Mobility and Mental health*. Springfield: Thomas; 1965.
7. Lin KM. Psychopathology and social disruption in refugees. In: Williams CL, Westermeyer J, editors. *Refugee Mental Health in resettlement countries*. Washington DC: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation; 1986. p.61-73.
8. Stein BN. Understanding the refugee experiences: Foundation of a better resettlement system. *Journal of Refugee Resettlement* 1981;1:62-71.
9. Stein BN. The experience of being a refugee: Insight from the research literature. In: Williams CL, Westermeyer J, editors. *Refugee Mental Health in resettlement countries*. Washington DC: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation; 1986. p.5-23.
10. Kunz EF. Exile, resettlement and refugee theory. *International Migration Review* 1981;15:42-51.
11. Mollica RF, Donelan K, Tor S, Lavelle J, Elias C, Frankel M, et al. The Effect of Trauma and Confinement on Functional Health and Mental Health Status of Cambodians Living in Thai-Cambodian Border Camps. *J Am Med Assoc* 1993;270:581-6.
12. Mollica RF, Poole C, Son L, Murray CC, Tor S. Effect of war trauma on Cambodian refugee adolescents functional health and mental health status. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 1997;36:1098-106.
13. Mollica RF, McInnes K, Pham T, Fawzi MCS, Murphy E, Lin L. Dose-effect relationships between torture and psychiatric symptoms in Vietnamese ex-political detainees and a comparison group. *J Nerv Ment Dis* 1998;186:542-53.
14. Mollica RF, McInnes K, Tor S. The dose-effect relationships of trauma to symptoms of depression and post-traumatic disorder among Cambodian survivors of mass violence. *Br J Psychiatry* 1998;173:482-89.
15. Jeon WT. Anticipation of the adaptation of North Korean people to unified society after unification. Seoul: Board of Unification, Research Collection; 1995. p.1-66.
16. Jeon WT. Review of adaptation and Mental Health of Refugees and Perspectives and Counterplots in Korean Reunification Process. *J Korean Neuropsychiatr Assoc* 1997; 36:3-18.
17. Jeon WT, Min SK, Lee MH, Lee ES. Adjustment of North Korean defectors in South Korea. *J Korean Neuropsychiatr Assoc* 1997;36:145-61.

18. Lee CW, Kim HS. Policy recommendation for the support of North Korean defectors. Seoul: Korea Research Institute for Health and Society; 1996.
19. Min BC. Survey of North Korean defectors in South Korea. Seoul: Board of Unification; 1980.
20. Oh HJ. Adaptation of North Korean defectors - social, cultural aspects. (Master thesis). Seoul: SeuGang University Press; 1995.
21. Park JC, Kim YY, Lee WY. Study about North Korean defectors - survey and suggestions. Seoul: The Research Institute for National Unification; 1996.
22. Yoon YS. Adaptation of North Korean defectors. (Master thesis). TaeGu: YoungNam University Press; 1994.
23. Johnson JC, Boster JS, Holbert D. Estimating Relational Attributes from Snowball Samples through Simulation. *Social Networks* 1989;11:135-58.
24. Lin KM, Masuda M, Tazuma L. Adaptational problems of Vietnamese refugees. Part III. Case studies in clinic and field: Adaptive and maladaptive. *The Psychiatric Journal of the University of Ottawa* 1982;7:173-83.
25. Nguyen SD. The psychosocial adjustment of the Southeast Asian refugee: An overview of empirical findings and theoretical models. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 1984;16:153-73.
26. Perdeson S. Psychopathological reactions to extreme social displacements (refugee neuroses). *Psychoanal Rev* 1949;36:344-54.
27. Rubin BS. Refugee resettlement: A unique role for family service. *Social Casework* 1982;63:301-4.
28. Westermeyer J, Vang TF, Lyfong G. Hmong refugees in Minnesota: Characteristics and self-perception. *Minn Med* 1983;66:431-9.
29. Guendelman SR. South American refugees: Stresses involved in relocation in the San Francisco exploratory fieldwork: Understanding the adjustment of Vietnamese refugees in the Washington area. *Anthropological Quarterly* 1981;54:94-102.
30. Beiser M, Barwick C, Berry JW. After the Door Has Been Opened. (Report of Task force of Mental Health Issues affecting Immigrants and Refugees). Ottawa: Multiculturalism and Citizenship and Health and Welfare; 1988.
31. Dion K, Earn B, Yee P. The experience of being a victim of prejudice: An experimental approach. *Int J Psychol* 1978;13:290-303.
32. Jahoda M. Race relations and mental health. Paris: UNESCO; 1960.
33. Willie CV, Kramer BM, Brown BS, editors. Racism and Mental Health. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press; 1973.
34. World Health Organization. Apartheid and Health. Geneva: WHO; 1983.
35. Brown G. Issues in the resettlement of Indochinese refugees. *Social Casework* 1982;63:155-9.
36. Chan KB, Lam L. Resettlement of Vietnamese-Chinese refugees in Montreal Canada: Some socio-psychological problems and dilemmas. *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes Ethniques au Canada* 1983;15:1-17.
37. Nicassio PM, Pate JK. An analysis of the problems of the Indochinese refugees in the United States. *Social Psychiatry* 1984;19:135-41.