

## The effect of CPRT on North Korean fugitive mothers' empathy ability and their children's problem behavior



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### ABSTRACT

The present research utilizes the statistical program SPSS 23.0. First, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test examined the homogeneity of the socio-demographic characteristics of the experimental group and the control group. The Mann-Whitney U Test and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test were conducted through a nonparametric statistical method. The results are summarized. First, CPRT improved the empathy of the experiment group compared with the control group. Second, many positive behavioral changes were observed in the process of their therapy. They became more accepting of the emotion of their children and less playful and more supportive of the play-focusing program. Third, it was found that the experiment group's behavior problems of the children were improved in contrast to those of the control group. The CPRT appeared to be significant in improving these behavior problems in children. The results of the analysis are expected to provide base data that can be used in the field to help young children increase such abilities.

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### 1. Introduction

Korean government distinguishes North Korean fugitive children (born in North Korea and/or with no family) from children of North Korean fugitives (born in a third country or Korea) in providing legal support. In the field of public and private services to help them get adjusted and settled in a new environment, however, it was found that adolescents of both types suffer from similar difficulties and possess similar needs (Yoon, 2010). In the current analysis, thus, we hold an integrated view and define 'North Korean fugitive children as those attending an elementary school of both types: both the young children who were born in North Korea and defected to Korea and those children born in Korea or a third country in North Korean fugitive families. North Korean fugitive children can be characterized by showing the following features.

First, as expected, they usually experience insecure family environments. According to the investigation of such fugitive children by South-North One Foundation, they experience separation

from intimate subjects due to their unstable family environments. Financial issues had already made a great deal of their experience living away from their parents in North Korea. Many of the subjects go through family disorganization during the process of defecting to Korea (Panuccio et al., 2022).

Second, these children experience emotional difficulties. A psychological test of North Korean fugitive children found that they experience psychological/emotional maladjustment and conflicts with parents and peers resulting from academic underachievement, depression, and aggression. Lack of affection, which might be attributable to their insecure environments would lead many of them to emotional difficulties in relation to attention and socialization (Grue and Laerum, 2002).

Third, these young children show different levels of academic performance. In particular, the upper class of elementary school struggle with adapting to school life, partly because some of the fugitive children are older than their classmates (Oh, 2011). Such a difference in the learning level might lead to more serious problems including maladjustment and/or drop-out.

The severe tension and anxiety that they had to go through during the process of defection would lead to these fugitive children's emotional instability. The fugitive parents, on the other hand, would face marital conflicts owing to different gender roles and

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financial difficulties after entry to Korea, which often causes them to get divorced (Guerney, 1964).

Most of the fugitive children live with a single parent or grandparents and have a hard time getting adjusted to the different educational systems and values of Korean society. The consequent unstable family environment is often neglected and leads them to increased psychological stress at school and in society. They do not know how to solve such problems and conflicts, protect themselves and control their emotions, which would, as a consequence, result in trouble with peers (Oh, 2011; Guerney, 1964).

These unstable environments and circumstances would bring the fugitive children many negative symptoms including fatigue, indecisiveness, underestimation of themselves, and eventually maladjustment (Lee and Jang, 2019). In sum, their inability to control emotions such as anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, aggressiveness, and lack of attention would often cause their struggles at school and with peers.

The Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) training program used in this research with the 10 session model that had been developed by Lee and Kim (2015) for the children who have the problem of the adaptation who were from 3 years old to 10 years old by Bratton and Landreth (2006), Kim (2021), and Guerney (1964) had been used as the basis.

The current study attempts to examine how CPRT affects mothers' empathy for North Korean fugitives and children's behavior problems. The results of the analysis are expected to help improve the mother's empathy for the North Korean fugitive, prevent children's emotional problems and provide them with early therapeutic intervention.

## 2. Methods

The subject was 6 North Korean fugitive mothers from the association of North Korea fugitive mother of M North Korea fugitive family support center and community social welfare support center in Seoul. The group consisted of 5 boys and 5 girls. 6 of them were born in a third country, 2 in North Korea, and 2 in Korea. As for their housing, 6 of them were living in a group home, and 4 of them were living with their families. A control group also consisted of 5 boys and 5 girls. 6 of them were born in a third country, 2 in North Korea, and 2 in Korea. 5 of them lived in a group home and the other 5 lived with their families. This study proceeded with a pretest-posttest experiment group and control group in order to investigate the effect of the play-focusing group program on North Korean fugitive children's ability to control emotions and to get adjusted to school life. The experiment group and the control group had a pretest and a posttest, but the group program was accomplished only for the experimental group.

The current study used Measurement of Empathy in Adult-Child Interaction (MEACI) to test how CPRT

to North Korean fugitive mothers would affect their empathy for children's behavior problems: Acceptive communication, the permission of self-guidance, and parents' intervention. The items were measured on a 5-point scale. A higher score meant higher empathy and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .93.

The current research utilized Oh (2011)'s Korean Child Behavior Checklist (K-CBCL). This tool consisted of North Korean fugitive parents with children's behavior problems with internal and external problems. The items were measured on a 5-point scale. A higher score meant higher behavior problems and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .89.

The program consists of 10 sessions: introducing the program and participants' names, tracking, do/do not, defining limitations, daily problems, self-esteem, courage, decision, and keeping the rules. Each session lasted 50 minutes starting from 4 pm every Thursday. Before the program started, the subjects received an informative orientation and took a pretest. After completion of the program, they had a posttest as well. Out of 10 in the initial group, 2 subjects dropped for reasons like moving and health problems. The other group also went through the same procedure as well as the same pretest and posttest.

The present research utilized SPSS 23.0. First, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine the homogeneity of the socio-demographic characteristics of the experimental and the control groups. This test assesses the differences between the two groups by comparing the mean ranks of the data under analysis. Second, the non-parametric test like Wilcoxon signed-rank Test was also used to investigate the changes between the results of the pretest and those of the posttest of the subjects' empathy and their children's behavior problem. This test compared the mean ranks by assigning minus or plus ranks in order to identify the changes between the pretest and the posttest.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Groups' homogeneity

The homogeneity of the two groups to mothers' empathy showed that the mean of the experiment group was 12.11 in contrast to 8.92 of the control group. Thus, the difference was not significant, investigating the homogeneity of the two groups in their empathy before the play-focusing group program was conducted.

As for the subjects' adaptation to problem behavior, it was also found that the two groups showed no significant difference. The mean of the experiment group and the control group were 9.85 and 11.15. Thus, it might be assumed that homogeneity was secured between the two groups in terms of empathy and behavior problems. Table 1 shows the homogeneity of empathy ability and problem behavior.

**Table 1:** Homogeneity of empathy ability and problem behavior

	Group	N	M order	Sum of Order	U	z	p
Empathy ability	Experiment	8	12.11	121.00	34.00	-1.22	.22
	Control	8	8.92	89.00			
Behavior problem	Experiment	8	9.85	98.50	43.50	-.49	.62
	Control	8	11.15	111.50			

### 3.2. Difference in empathy ability

The difference in empathy ability changing North Korean fugitive mothers appeared in Table 2; the significantly positive rank of empathy was 8; the negative rank of empathy ability was 0. A pretest and a posttest were given to the subjects of both groups to examine the influence the play-oriented group counseling program might have on the North Korean fugitive children's ability to control empathy ability.

Wilcoxon test was used for the experiment group to compare the test of the pretest and the posttest in their ability to control empathy ability. It was found

that the mean of the cases whose tests were higher at the post-test than the pretest was 5.53 and that of the opposite cases was 0.00. The difference was significant at the  $p < .01$  level, which indicates that the play-oriented group counseling program had a positive effect on the experimental group's ability to control empathy ability. In contrast to the significant experiment group difference, the control group is not significantly different both the pretest and the posttest, which might also support the claim that the play-oriented was effective in helping improve their ability to control empathy ability.

**Table 2:** Difference between empathy ability and children's problem

group		N	M order	Sum of Order	z
Experimental: empathy ability	n.r <sup>a</sup>	8	5.53	55.00	-2.85**
	p.r <sup>b</sup>	0	.00	.00	
	tie <sup>c</sup>	0			
	total	8			
Control: empathy ability	n.r <sup>a</sup>	0	1.53	3.00	-1.33
	p.r <sup>b</sup>	1	.00	.00	
	tie <sup>c</sup>	7			
	total	8			

\*\* $p < .01$  a. post test < pre test; b. post test > pre test; c. post test = pre test

### 3.3. Difference in behavior problem

The difference in behavior problems changing North Korean fugitive mothers shown in Table 3; was a significantly positive rank of behavior problem of 8; a negative rank of behavior problem of 0. A pretest and a posttest were given to the subjects of both groups to examine the influence the play-oriented group counseling program might have on the North Korean fugitive children's ability to control problem behavior.

Wilcoxon test was used for the experiment group to compare the measurements of the pretest and the posttest in their ability to control problem behavior.

It was found that the mean of the subjects whose measurements were higher at the posttest than the pretest was 4.40 and that of the opposite cases was 0.00. The difference was statistically meaningful at the  $p < .01$  level, which indicates that the play-oriented group counseling program had a positive effect on the experiment group's ability to control problem behavior. In contrast to the significant change of the experiment group, the control group did appear significant change between the pretest and the posttest, which also support the claim that the play-oriented was effective in helping improve their ability to control problem behavior.

**Table 3:** Difference in behavior problem of program

group		N	Mean order	Sum of Order	z
Experimental: problem behavior	n.r <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0	-2.88**
	p.r <sup>b</sup>	8	4.40	44.5	
	tie <sup>c</sup>	0			
	total	8			
Control: problem behavior	n.r <sup>a</sup>	2	1.50	3.50	-.25
	p.r <sup>b</sup>	6	.00	.00	
	tie <sup>c</sup>	0			
	total	8			

\*\* $p < .01$  a. post test < pre test; b. post test > pre test; c. post test = pre test

## 4. Conclusion

First, the research subjects who have only lived in Korea for a short period of time had language problems as well as a cultural barrier. Thus, in order to have smoother progress, the research tools were translated into Chinese by some experts in the Chinese language. Still, however, it was not easy for

the children to understand the whole program owing to cultural differences. Thus, it seems necessary that the play-oriented group counseling program be revised in order to consider and reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of North Korean fugitive children.

Second, the present research proceeded with the children. Further research should be expanded to

children of various age groups, considering that the number of children defecting from North Korea is on the increase and that about 20 % of such fugitive children are preschool children in 2020.

Third, the current research identified a variety of problems and needs of North Korean fugitive families. It was pointed out that many family problems were attributable to the differences between husband and wife, and between parents and children in getting adjusted to a new environment in Korea. Therefore, psychological and educational intervention seems to be indispensable for the parents of such families. Also, we should keep providing special care and family counseling for single-parent families and those without family.

The current research is meaningful in that it did identify the positive effect of the counseling program on North Korean fugitive children's ability to control empathy ability and problem behavior. A variety of issues on school-aged children's adaptation to school life have been investigated and reported in the literature. In particular, these fugitive children usually suffer from psychological trauma and acculturation stress. Their emotional control and adaptation to school life school are crucial for their lives since school is the place where they first have a social experience. The play-oriented group counseling program, in that sense, shed some light on the way to help North Korean fugitive children get adjusted to school life.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

### Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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