

A Group Case Study of Bibliotherapy for North Korean Defectors' Children in South Korea

Sanyong Kim*, Grace Eunjoo Kang, Hyeonsub Cho*****

** Department of Addiction, Rehabilitation, & Counseling, Chongshin University,
143 Sadang-Ro, Seoul, Korea
E-mail: ksy@csu.ac.kr*

***Department of Early Childhood Education, Chongshin University, 143 Sadang-Ro, Seoul, Korea
E-mail: ejkang@csu.ac.kr, kangeunjoo77@daum.net*

** Department of Addiction, Rehabilitation, & Counseling, Chongshin University,
E-mail: chohs@csu.ac.kr*

Abstract

A group case study of 8-session bibliotherapy for 2 groups of 67 children of North Korean defectors, ages 4 through 16, was practiced on a weekly basis at 2 different centers in Seoul, South Korea. This research findings tell that participants' defensive attitudes were alleviated by short term bibliotherapy but their psycho-social changes were not clear in comparison with those of South Korean children. Participants in the current study seemed to seek longer-term and more intimate bibilotherapy for sharing and meeting their diverse needs. They seemed to recognize that bibliotherapy could satisfy their social, cognitive, cultural, and lingual needs by reading books to gain information, - and sharing their feelings about acquiring language and cultural knowledge as well as getting to know how to identify themselves as South Koreans in their new home. Their psycho-social traumas were revealed through long-term symptoms, which may require treatment throughout their life-times because of their severity. This implies that their settlement and psycho-social stability should be secured by a national long-term support system under a holistic umbrella.

Key Words: North Korean defectors' children, trans-generational trauma, picture story books, bibliotherapy, South Korea(n), North Korea(n),

1. Current Issues of Children of North Korean Defectors' Families

1.1 Increasing Population of North Korean Defectors' Children

The population of North Korean defectors' families has been continuously increasing in South Korea since year 1998 and grew to 26,854 in June 2014. About 2000 defectors enter South Korea annually. The female population of total defectors is estimated as 82% of the total number of North Korean defectors in the year 2014, and the annual average is 70%. Especially 20-49 year olds are 78% of the total female population. These statistics have meaningful implications from many perspectives. The total population of NK defectors' children under age 9 is about 1,152 and 2,564 range in age from 10 to 19. Most of them show maladjustment to intensive educational competitions, low school achievement, poor peer

relationships, a high drop-out rate as well as dysfunctional parent-child relationships in their families [1]. They urgently need personal, social, and national attentions and systematic supports.

1.2 Psycho-Social Wounds from Trans-generational Trauma in Parent-Child Relationships of North Korean Families

The trans-generational trauma of North Korea defectors' families has resulted in dysfunctional family structures. Adaptation to South Korea has been a hot issue for North Korean families from a holistic perspective as a prerequisite problem to be solved before Korea is united [2].

Traumatic events in the past in North Korea such as torture and separation from blood family members when they left their home country, current stress levels of adaptation to a democratic society of SK have been correlated with depression, anxiety, and post trauma syndrome disorder [3].

Parents' maladaptation and dysfunctional parent-child relationships are interwound with identity problems, high divorce rate of parents, spouse/child abuse, low self-esteem, low-educational backgrounds, unstable job/income, cultural/language problems for parents in depression and isolation, which seem to be transferred to their children and low academic achievement, peer-bullying, and adaptation stress in school settings for children [4]. Therefore, North Korean defectors families need holistic support. This research, however, focuses on their children's psycho-social issues with bibliotherapy.

2. Bibliotherapy as an Appropriate Treatment and Prevention

Bibliotherapy is used for social adjustment, emotional well-being, better self-management, and personal happiness. It uses specially prescribed reading materials [5] including literature, poems, animations, lyrics, diary, and autobiography, as therapeutic resources [6]. Bibliotherapy helps readers to increase their awareness and understanding of family dynamics, to foster insights into problem-solving, and to promote empathy with others' feelings [7].

Bibliotherapy can use children's literature or picture story books as well. Children can be exposed to others' perspectives and learn how to solve their own common problems when they see characters in the books dealing with their negative feelings in constructive ways. The children become more capable of dealing with their own problems by making use of information resources from what they read. They have opportunities to become active life managers and self-therapists, capable of resolving their own conflicts and gaining insight into alternative solutions for their own problems [8]. BT can thus be used as a tool for not only

therapeutic treatment, but also for prevention of childhood psycho-social conflicts [9] and inner problems which can be cost-effective for their later lives.

Children of NK defectors need psycho-social therapy like bibliotherapy urgently in order to live happily and adjust to new life in SK since they have more possibility to be get along with South Korean society when they are exposed to South Korean culture, language, and system naturally. They also can be immersed in the main characters' stories in the books, identify with the characters, recognize their own similar experiences, and gain insight to solve their problems for themselves. This will help them to become active problem-solvers as well as self-healing leaders in the process of bibliotherapy in a group. Participants in group therapy may contribute as emotional supporters.

3. Case Study of Bibliotherapy for Children of North Korea Defectors'

3.1 Participants

Two groups of 67 children of North Korean defectors from age 4 through high school participated in group bibliotherapy. 16 college students of early childhood education in a pre-service program volunteered to read books and conduct post-reading activities to reinforce weekly therapeutic goals for 2 hours weekly for 8 weeks. The 18 participants are described in table 1. One group of children stayed at a boarding school and after school daycare center operated by a family of North Korean defectors.

There were 39 children in the group, but only 7 children attended the 8 weeks; however, others were absent 2-3 times for going home on weekends. The other group of children is stayed with their families and gathered at a day care center every week. They lived in government rental apartment in a community for NK defectors. They had different histories of leaving North Korean and entering South Korea. They had also stayed in South Korea for different lengths of time.

Table 1. Participants in Group Bibliotherapy from families of North Korean defectors (N)

Groups	Preschool ages	Elementary School Grades	Junior High Schoolers	Dormitory School	Total
Dormitory Child Care Center	5(2), 6(1)	1(2), 2(2), 3(2) 4(5), 5(3), 6(6)	(10)	(6)	(39)
	(3)	(20)	(10)	(6)	
Child Care Center	4(1), 5(3)	1(4), 2(4), 3(2), 4(4)	(0)		(18)
	(4)	(14)	(0)	(0)	

3.2 Bibliotherapy Program for North Korean Defectors' Children

8 sessions of BT for children of North Korean defectors were executed as shown in table 2. The main goal of the program was to build self-esteem and self-concept of children by recognizing their uniqueness, expressing empathy with themselves and others, accepting others as they are, encouragement/empowerment, having happy moments with their families, valuing differences, and changing attitudes toward self and others in a positive way. All the participants read each picture book and were asked to express their feelings and thoughts according to 4 steps of Hynes-Berry and Hynes: recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to self [10]. Each session of the bibliotherapy program is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. A Bibliotherapy Program Practiced for Children of NK Defectors

	Themes	Goals	Resource Books/Materials	Related Activities
1	Who am I?	Diagnosis of Participants	Self-Concept Pre-Test, HTP/KFD Pre-Test.	Group Filling Each Test
2	I am Special	To recognize that I am special & unique	<You are special> (animated) by Max Lucado. Polaroid camera, stationery. 100 list sheets.	Post reading questions. Writing 100 lists why I am special.
3	Please understand my feeling	Tell about my feelings and receive empathy	<Spinky Sulks> by William Steig. Emotion cards & colored papers.	Post reading questions. Tell my feeling after posting my good/sad feeling pictures on the colored paper and explain why.
4	I need friends	Accept myself as I am	<Lonely lion needs friends> by Nakano Hirokaju. Role play with animal masks. Color pens and stationery.	Post reading questions. Role play for empathy activities.
5	I am happy as I am encouraged	I can be better with positive encouragements	<Edwardo, the horrible boy in the whole wide world> by John Burningham. Compliment Game.	Post reading questions. Write a compliment on the post-it and stick it on each child.
6	Have a fun with my family	Make a happy moment with my family	<Pete's Pizza> by William Steig. Making pizza with colored papers. Make canapes with crackers.	Post reading questions. Making a pizza with my body. Making a canape with crackers.
7	Everyone is different	Value the differences & accept them.	<Peoples> by Peter Spier.	Post reading questions. Make ethnic costumes to understand cultural diversity.
8	Look at me. I have been changed	Find how I have changed over the last 8 weeks.	Post-Test with Self-Concept, HTP/KFD	See the result of pre- and post-test and find how I have changed between the two.
9	Evaluation Meeting for Volunteers			

4. Conclusion

The short-term bibliotherapy for children of NK defectors appears to have been successful in alleviating the participants' defensive attitude toward program supporters. It gives, however, quite surprising finding that participants' psycho-social trauma has not changed meaningfully after 8 weeks of bibliotherapy. This is a big difference between children of NK defectors and general traumatized children in South Korea. Most South Korean children with trauma and psycho-social problems show positive changes during 8-week bibliotherapy and therapeutic programs.

The finding implies that trauma of North Korean defectors' children are too severe to be alleviated by short-term treatment. Rather they need more intimate and long-term bibliotherapy as well as cognitive, cultural, academic, peer-supportive treatments. Their psycho-social problems, concrete, and therapeutic programs such as bibliotherapy at a micro-level should be provided systematically as full and rich healing long-term program to alleviate the problems of children of NK defectors at macro-level as a whole.

Book reading experiences in the process of bibliotherapy can be good bridges to connect children of NK defectors with South Korean children to share common experiences through reading the same books and acquiring problem-solving knowledge and reading skills as they identify with main characters and build their positive self-esteem and self-concept.

The participants seemed to be eager for intimate and long-term programs so that their diverse survival needs could be more fundamentally met in terms of psycho-social therapy, cognitive compensation, cultural and lingual learning system in a holistic way at micro- and macro-level. Bibliotherapy with picture story books with well-prescribed therapeutic resources for North Korean children are strongly recommended as effective media for providing them with cultural background knowledge, reading opportunities for learning about a new society,- and learning unfamiliar culture and language. The program also provides academic support for better adaptation to South Korean society. Fundamental long-term, high quality interventions of governmental system should be practiced with professional programs to settle the North Korean defectors' families as well which influence strong on the well-being of young children.

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**** Corresponding author: Grace Eunjoo Kang, Ph.D.**

Department of Early Childhood Education

Chongshin University

143 Sadang-Ro, Dongjak-Gu, Seoul, Korea

E-mail: kangeunjoo77@daum.net, ejkang@csu.ac.kr,