

## Towards an Understanding of North Korean Adolescent Refugees in South Korea

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For South Korea, the last decade has been marked with the transition from a homogeneous to a multicultural society. Adding to the diversity are North Korean refugees, international marriages, and incoming foreign workers. Each group's adjustment and well-being are important not only for the individuals but also for South Korean society as a whole. A major task for the Korean society is harmonious togetherness while acknowledging each group's uniqueness. Understanding each group and the problems they face are prerequisites in fostering the adjustment process and harmonious cohabitants of the diverse groups. As a stepping-stone, this article will focus on North Korean adolescent refugees, a rapidly growing group within the multicultural South Korean society. More specifically, this article will focus on understanding the unique problems they face in their adjustment process by reviewing previous literature. Furthermore, it will discuss possible roles for the church in aiding their adjustment.

The number of North Korean refugees in South Korea has increased rapidly in the past decade and is expected to steadily rise (Ministry of Unification, 2012). Eight refugees were admitted in 1993. However, since 2007 more than 2,500 refugees have been admitted each year, with a record high of 2,914 refugees admitted in 2009. As of July 2012, there are more than 24,000 North Korean refugees living in South Korea. Of those, 12% (2,730) are adolescents between the ages of 10 to 19, and 4% (971) are children between the ages of newly born to 9 (Ministry of Unification, 2012). Elementary enrollment for North Korean refugee children have more than doubled from 341 students in 2007 to 773 students in 2010 while middle school and high school students enrollment have increased from 431 students in 2007 to 644 students in 2010 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011).

The children and adolescent refugee population is expected to continue to rise (Ahn, 2010; Lee et al., 2003). However, the adjustment of these North Korean refugee children and adolescents is not an easy

matter. The high dropout rate of North Korean refugee adolescents is a barometer of the difficulties they face. In fact, Chung, Chung, & Yang (2004) found that only 38% of their research participants were enrolled in middle or high school. The social, cultural, and psychological adjustment of these children and adolescents are of importance not only for each individual but also for South Korean society. Furthermore, it can be used in understanding how North and South Koreans can come together in the future as a reunified Korean society.

North Korean adolescent refugees living in South Korea face difficulties in many areas of their lives: as an individual, within their families, and school. This article discusses their adjustment process by focusing on the challenges they endure in each of these areas. However, first, the definition and brief history of North Korean refugees will be discussed for background information.

### Definition and History of North Korean Refugees in South Korea

According to Article 2 (1) of the “Act on the Protection of and Settlement Support for Residents who Escaped from North Korea,” a refugee/defector (Pukhanitaljumin 북한이탈주민) is defined as “a person with an address, an immediate family, spouse, job in North Korea who has escaped North Korea without acquiring foreign nationality.”<sup>1</sup>

Chung (2008) gives a helpful summary of the history of the North Korean refugees. He divides the refugee history of North Koreans into six periods: The division of Korea (1945-1950), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Cold War (1962-1993), Post-Cold War (1993-1997), North Korean Famine (1997-2004), South-North Korean Communication and Cooperation Project (2005-Present). According to Chung (2008), people who crossed the southern border during 1962 to 1993 were considered heroes. They were rewarded under the Special Relief Act for Patriots and Defectors to the South (1962).<sup>2</sup> They brought military secrets and also became symbols to promote the propaganda of the superiority of capitalism in South Korea. Most were former officers and diplomats of North Korea. The number was few with less than ten “political refugees” arriving each year. They were referred to as defectors (귀순자) or heroes/soldiers who had defected (귀순용사).

1. 북한이탈주민이란 북한에 주소, 직계가족, 배우자, 직장 등을 두고 있는 사람으로서 북한을 벗어난 후 외국 국적을 취득하지 않은 사람을 말합니다(「북한이탈주민의 보호 및 정착지원에 관한 법률」 제2조제1호).

2. 국가유공자 및 월남귀순자 특별원호법 enacted on April 16, 1962.

*Post-Cold War Period (1993–1997)*

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a negative impact on the economy and social systems of North Korea, causing many to leave in search of food. As shown in Figure 1, 54 people entered the South in 1994, compared to 8 in 1993. The large increase in the number of defectors as well as their diminishing political usefulness during the post-cold war led to drastic cuts in the financial resettlement policies making it more difficult for the defectors to adjust to South Korean society (Chung, 2008). The terms used in the Act on the Protection of North Korean Repatriates (1993)<sup>3</sup> implied political defection. However, “the law itself treated these people more as economic defectors or people under social welfare than as heroes” (Chung, 2008, p. 9). This is the period when the media began using the term “Escapees from the North” (탈북자), a common term still used by many (Chung, 2008).

*North Korean Famine Period (1997–2004)*

In 1995, famine began in North Korea leading to starvation and countless deaths. The famine drove North Koreans across the border to China in search of food (Chung, 2008; Lankov, 2004). The number of North Korean refugees increased drastically during 1997 to 2004, with 1,898 people entering South Korea in 2004 alone. The demographics of the refugees changed during this period from single adult men in the past to a drastic increase in the number of women and families (Chung, 2008; Lee et al., 2003). Case in point, in 1998, only 12% of the North Korean refugee population was women. However, since 2002, more women crossed the border than men each year. As of July 2012, almost 70% (16,583 out of 24,010 people) of the North Korean refugee population in South Korea are women (Ministry of Unification, 2012).

In 1997, the Korean legislature modified the existing 1993 protection act to the Act on Protection and Resettlement Support for the Residents Who Escaped from North Korea.<sup>4</sup> Based on this new act, in 1999, the Korean government opened a resettlement adjustment support center (북한이탈주민 정착지원사무소) called Hanawon.<sup>5</sup> In order to equip the refugees for adjustment in the new culture, Hanawon provided and continues to provide a three-month-program that offers support and training on many aspects of the adjustment process.

3. 귀순 북한동포 보호법 enacted on December 12, 1993.

4. 북한이탈주민의 보호 및 정착지원에 관한 법률 enacted on July 14, 1997.

5. ‘Hana’ means one and ‘won’ means center. The name implies a place where North and South Koreans come together as one (‘하나로 화합하는 장’) (Park, 2009).

### South-North Korean Communication and Cooperation Project (2005–Present)

In order to break away from the negative connotation of “escapee” in 1995, the Ministry of Unification announced a new term for the refugees, “New Settlers” (새터민), meaning “people living with hope in a new place” (새로운 터전에서 삶의 희망을 갖고 사는 사람) (Ministry of Unification, 2005; Yonhap News, 2005). However, this term was received with much opposition from the North Korean refugees claiming that the term removed the political meaning from their identity (Chung, 2008; Kim, 2007). In 2008, the Ministry of Unification announced they would change the term from “New Settlers” (새터민) to “Residents Who Left North Korea” (북한이탈주민). There is still much debate regarding the appropriate term, and different articles use different terms. In this article, for convenience, the “Residents Who Left North Korea” (북한이탈주민) will be called North Korean refugees.

### Challenges North Korean Adolescent Refugees Face in South Korea

The literature shows that children and adolescent refugees around the world experience difficulties as they adjust to the new host country (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Rousseau, Drapeau, & Rahimi, 2003; Weine, 2011). Although North Korean adolescent refugees are not well researched, they are no exception to the fact that their adjustment experience<sup>6</sup> is a difficult one. The following are the key obstacles North Korean adolescent refugees face and the different variables that may affect their adjustment process.

#### *Obstacles*

North Korean adolescent refugees in South Korea (henceforth referred to as adolescent refugees) face many obstacles in the adjustment process. Some are common to all North Korean refugees regardless of age while some are more salient to adolescents. Some key obstacles the adolescent refugees face are poor physical growth, issues relating

6. Different articles define and assess adjustment in various ways. Some assess for mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety disorders, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), while others measure behavioral problems and social functioning skills within the different areas of the adolescents' lives. There are a few that evaluate for physical problems and still others assess psychological difficulties such as lack of confidence, or loneliness. This article reviewed articles that included all the various criteria for adjustment mentioned above.

to education, peer relationships, family, and hardships they encounter during their flight to South Korea.

*Physical Health.* Many of the North Korean adolescents come to South Korea exhibiting poor physical growth (Ahn, 2010; Choi, Choi, & Kang, 2006; Chung, Chung, & Yang, 2004; Han et al., 2010; Kwon, Lee, Kim, Kim & Jung, 2008). In fact, over 60% of North Korean children and adolescents are under weight. The average height for North Korean adolescents is 12 to 20 cm shorter than that of their counterparts in South Korea (Kwon et al., 2008). This could be due to several years of famine that started in 1995 and malnutrition. Research has found that many adolescent refugees exhibit feelings of inferiority because of their body (Choi, et al., 2006; Han et al., 2010; Lee, 2002 cited in Paik, Gil, Yoon, & Lee, 2007). Considering the fact that adolescents are at a developmental stage where they go through puberty and have heightened awareness of their own bodies and body images, it is understandable that their negative body image has a negative impact on their adjustment process.

Moreover, Yang & Bae (2010) report that some adolescent refugees complain of chronic illness. They report that the poor living conditions in North Korea and the dangerous and unsanitary conditions they experience coming to South Korea all contribute to illnesses. One of the participants in Yang & Bae's study (2010) shared that she fell from an elevated place and broke her ribs. The problem is compounded since many of these adolescents do not receive proper medical attention even when they arrive in South Korea (Yang & Bae, 2010). Research on adult North Korean refugees also report higher rates of illnesses compared to South Koreans (Jeon, Yu, Eom, & Kim, 2009; Lee et al., 2003; Yoon & Kim, 2005). Poor physical health makes the adjustment process more difficult for both adolescents and adult refugees (Baik et al., 2007; Jeon et al., 2009; Yoon & Kim, 2005).

*Educational Issues.* For adolescent refugees, education and how to do well at school are their biggest concerns (Choi, 2010; Chung et al., 2004; Jeon et al., 2009; Kwon et al., 2008; Lee et al, 2003). This is understandable since education is considered one of the few ways to improve one's social status (Chung, 2008). However, despite the priority given to education, there is a high dropout rate among middle and high school refugee students (Ahn, 2010, Chung et al., 2004; Park, 2008; Yang & Bae, 2010). In fact, the dropout rate for adolescent refugees is ten times that of their South Korean counterparts (Park, 2008). Furthermore, some adolescent refugees do not even enter the formal South Korean educational system due to the age differences with their potential classmates (Yang & Bae, 2010). The leading factor that is contributing to their educational problem is the loss of schooling for adolescent refugees

(Ahn, 2010; Chung, 2008, Chung et al., 2004; Han, Yoon, Lee Kim & Lee, 2009; Lee et al., 2003; Kwon et al., 2008; Yang & Bae, 2010). Other obstacles are differences in the educational system between the North and the South (Chung et al., 2004; Kum et al., 2003), differences in academic ability (Kum, Kwon, Lee, & Lee, 2004; Lee et al., 2003), and differences in exposure to foreign languages, such as English (Kum et al., 2003).

During the 1990s, North Korea went through severe economic crisis. School systems broke down because of cutbacks in the number of teachers, lack of textbooks and educational materials, and a large absence of the majority of students who went looking for food. Thus the majority of adolescent refugees were not able to receive formal education on a regular basis while living in North Korea (Han et al., 2009; Jeon et al., 2009; Kwon et al., 2008). Furthermore, many of the adolescent refugees were not able to receive education while living in third countries<sup>7</sup> before their arrival in South Korea (Jeon et al., 2009; Kwon et al., 2008). Case in point, Jeon and his colleagues (2009) report that 75% of the students enrolled in HanGeoRae Middle and High School<sup>8</sup> did not receive formal education during their stay in the third country.

Due to this long absence from the educational system, the majority of adolescent refugees are not placed in the grade that corresponds to their age in the South Korean educational system (Chung et al., 2004; Kwon et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2003). Chung and colleagues (2004) report that 62% of their participants were placed a year to two years below their age while 12% were placed four to six years below their age. In addition, some do not even enter the educational system due to the mismatch of their age and grade level (Yang & Bae, 2010). In fact, Park (2008) reports that 37% of her participants were preparing for General Equivalency Diploma (GED) instead of attending school.

The long absence of schooling also lowers their academic abilities compared to their South Korean counterparts (Chung et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2003). Among the participants 73% in a study (Chung et al., 2004), the researchers chose “catching up with studies” as the most difficult problem in school. Moreover, majority of the adolescent refugees have not been exposed to English, which is considered an important subject here in the South. Differences in educational goals and teaching methods also compounds the difficulties adolescent refugees face in their school life (Chung, 2008).

7. “Third country (제3국)” is a term used for other countries of temporary residence.

8. This school opened on March 1st 2006 to tailor to North Korean adolescent refugees.

**Peer relationships.** Peer relationships, especially friendships, are an important aspect in an adolescent's life. Unfortunately adolescent refugees have added challenges in making friends than their South Korean counterparts. For one, they are confronted with negative stereotypes about being a refugee from North Korea (Han et al., 2010; Lee, 2002; Lee et al., 2003). Sometimes they are made fun of or ostracized because they are from the North (Ahn, 2010; Chung et al., 2004; Yoo, 2005). Due to the negative stereotypes of North Korean refugees, not all adolescent refugees reveal to peers about their origins. Chung and colleagues (2004) found that 75% of the participants announced that they were from North Korea. However, of those, only 18% voluntarily shared the information and for 75% of the cases the teacher informed the classes about their oppressive past. There were significant differences depending on the sex of the student on whether or not they shared where they came from. Compared to the boys, fewer girls shared the fact that they were North Korean refugees. Even when girls did share, it was only with close friends.

Language is another obstacle to overcome (Ahn, 2010; Baik et al., 2007; Choi et al., 2006; Chung et al., 2004; Lee, 2002; Yang & Bae, 2010). The differences in intonation and words make it harder to understand and be understood. The mix of slang and English words in South Korean adolescents' daily conversations increase the challenge to comprehend and communicate. Chung and colleagues (2004) report that some adolescent refugees interact less and less in order to hide their intonation and dialect. Some practice what to say over and over. The fear of exposing their refugee status leads to less interaction with peers, which hinders the possibility of developing meaningful friendships and support. In addition, the age gap with classmates does not make it easy for refugees to make friends (Chung et al., 2004; Lee, 2002).

All these factors add to the difficulty of making friends for adolescent refugees. North Korean Refugees Foundation (NKRF, 2011) reports that 18% of adolescent refugees do not have South Korean friends and another 18% have only one or two. Research shows that the less South Korean friends you have the more difficult it is to adjust (Baik et al., 2007; Chung et al., 2004; Yang & Bae, 2010). Thus, healthy peer relationships are an important factor that can aid refugees in the adjustment process.

**Family.** Families can be an important support system in times of difficulty, especially for adolescents (Han et al., 2010). NKRF (2011) reports that 65% of the adolescent refugees talk to parents when they have problems. This indicates the importance of family as a support system. Park (2008) also found that these adolescent refugees consid-

ered family as the most important nonofficial social support network.<sup>9</sup> However, many of the adolescent refugees have separated with one or both of their parents in the process of coming to South Korea. Kwon and colleagues (2008) found that 18% of the adolescent refugees had no family in the South, 3% lived with grandparents, 51% lived with the mother, 10% with the father, and only 9% was supported by both parents. Even those who were supported by both parents, 50% were divorced. Many refugees who are separated with one or more members of the family continuously try to find out the whereabouts of that person (Lee et al., 2003) leaving a sense of instability in life. In addition, negative emotions related to family separation, such as loss, guilt, and anxiety, complicates the adjustment process (Lee et al., 2003; Yoon, 2000 cited in Kim, 2005).

In addition to family separation, adolescent refugees are faced with additional family related obstacles in the adjustment process. For instance, the psychological and economical adjustment levels of the parents are important factors that relate to the adjustment level of the adolescent refugee (Choi et al., 2006). The differences in the acculturation speed between parent and child can provide reason for conflict (Choi et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2003). Furthermore, parenting style used in North Korea may not work in South Korean society and can become a source for conflict (Choi et al., 2006). Parent's remarriage is another factor that complicates the adolescent refugee's adjustment process (Chung et al., 2004, p.212).

*Encountering Hardships.* North Korean refugees, regardless of age, encounter many hardships while living in North Korea as well as during the flight to South Korea, and even after arriving in South Korea. Majority of the refugees experience life-threatening situations before arriving in Korea. Both Baik et al.'s study (2007) and Kum et al.'s study (2004) found that the most often occurred hardship was being fearful in the third country surrounded by unfamiliar language and culture. The second highest occurrence was fearing-for-life due to food shortage or severe weather. Some of the other hardships they experienced were witnessing torture or public execution; being cut off from family; being inspected by either a North Korean or Chinese guard; and being almost caught in the process of escaping North Korea. Kum and colleagues (2004) found that 79% of the participants experienced at least one hardship before arriving in South Korea. Once they arrived in South

9. Park (2008) divided the social support network into official and non-official groups. Examples of official groups are people in organizations such as teachers, religious leaders or social workers whereas nonofficial groups include families and friends.



Korea they encounter different kinds of hardship such as economic problems, acculturation stress, disintegration of family, and loss of self-identity (Ahn, 2010; Choi, 2010; Chung et al., 2004; Chung & Seo, 2007; Yang & Bae, 2010).

The hardships can, at times, be experienced as psychological trauma and create psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems which interfere with the adjustment process to South Korean society (Ahn, 2010; Baik et al., 2007; Chung et al., 2004; Kum et al., 2004; Yang & Bae, 2010). Adolescents can be more vulnerable to these exposures and it could take longer for them to overcome these obstacles.

### **Different Variables that Affect the Adjustment Process**

Despite the various obstacles, some adolescent refugees adjust better than others. In fact, some do extremely well excelling in many aspects in South Korean society (Chung et al., 2004). In order to understand the adjustment process, it is important to recognize that there are different variables that either aid or interfere in the adjustment process and to figure out what they are. However, the nature and dynamics of these variables are not simple. For one, the same variable could have different affects based on the area of adjustment that is being measured. For example, adolescent refugees who are enrolled in school have, on average, less internalizing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and fear. In contrast, school enrollment does not have a strong association with externalizing symptoms such as aggressiveness, hyperactivity, and lying (Baik et al., 2007). Furthermore, the same variable could have different affects based on the developmental stages of the person, thus aiding adolescent's adjustment but not an adult's acculturation.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, for many of the variables the results differ depending on the study. For example, as with research on refugees around the world (Fazel et al., 2012), there are mixed results regarding the relationship between the sex of the individual and adjustment levels. Some research found that there were no differences in the adjustment level based on the sex of the individual, while others found differences. Even within the articles that did find differences, there were variations in the results. According to Paik and her colleagues (2007), they found many articles reporting that men of all ages face more obstacles in the adjustment process than women. However, they also found other articles reporting that women experience higher levels of difficulties during the first few

10. Moreover, depending on the developmental stages of a person, different variables may come into play. For example, marital status and income is found to be an important indicator for adjustment in adult refugees, while variables related to school makes a difference in adolescent refugees.

years of arrival. To further complicate the understanding of the adjustment process, in many cases it is the combination of variables that helps or strengthens the adjustment process. For instance, Han and colleagues (2010) found that the adolescent refugees who had higher grades in North Korea, and longer length of residence in South Korea, with a higher family relationship quality tended to have better grades at school. Thus the adjustment process is a complex phenomenon. With this in mind, the following is a list of some of the different factors that could affect the adjustment process.

*Pre-Migration Experiences.* There is consensus in research that the more traumatic experiences one has, the more difficult it is for adolescent refugees to adjust (Baik et al., 2007; Chung and Seo, 2007). According to Jeon (1997) and Son (2002) (as cited in Chung & Seo, 2007) “Communist party membership, economic status in North Korea, level of education received in North Korea, whether the person has lived in Pyongyang, and other socioeconomic background indicators within North Korea” also have an impact on the adjustment level (p. 368). There are mixed results regarding length of stay in third countries (Lee et al., 2003). In addition, there are mixed results related to age when the adolescent arrived in Korea. Some research indicates the younger they are the better (Baik et al., 2007), while others yielded opposite results, while still others did not find any relationship between age and adjustment level.

*Length of Residency in South Korea.* Length of residence is another variable that tends to affect the adjustment process. Han and colleagues (2010) found that adolescent refugees who resided less than two to three years were having a tougher time adjusting than those who resided for four to five years or more than six years. Others found similar results with the longer length of stay leading to better adjustment to the South Korean culture (Park, 2008), better grades (Han et al., 2010), and less externalizing behavior (Baik et al., 2007). Researchers also found that different kinds of support were needed for adjustment depending on the length of residency (Han et al., 2010).

*Social Support.* Many different relationships can influence the adjustment process of an adolescent refugee. Relationships with parents, friends and teachers are especially noteworthy (Baik et al., 2007; Han et al., 2010; Park, 2008). For example, Han and colleagues (2010) found that adolescent refugees who lived with parents tended to focus more in class. Interestingly, Baik and colleagues (2007) found that adolescents with fewer South Korean friends and more number of family members in the South tended to exhibit higher levels of internalizing behavior such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and fear. They speculate that the higher numbers of family members could result in more conflict which

in turn leads to higher levels of internalizing behavior. In general, however, the relationships of parents, friends and teachers had a positive effect on the adjustment process.

*Religion.* Some adolescent refugees become Christians while staying in China. Many researches have found that religion has a positive role in the adjustment process of North Korean refugees (Baik et al., 2007; Choi, 2004; Jeon, Yu, & Eom, 2010). Some claim that it is the long-term and regular support of the religious organization that is effective rather than religion per se. Still others found that religion helped in the beginning stages of adjustment but became a negative influence as time went by with religious conflicts surfacing (Baik et al., 2007).

### Possible Roles for the Church

As seen above, North Korean adolescent refugees face many challenges during their adjustment process to South Korea. The adjustment process is further complicated by the different variables that come into play either in aiding or challenging the whole process of adjustment. Many organizations aid refugees in this adjustment process especially with the journey from North to South Korea. Most of these organizations are religion-based, especially Christianity. Many North Korean refugees become Christians during their journey to South Korea. In fact, more than half of the refugees become Christians (Baik et al., 2007; Choi, 2004; Jeon et al., 2009; Yoo, 2005). However it is not easy for them to continue their faith once they arrive in South Korea (Jeon & Cho, 2003). Therefore it is important that the South Korean churches aid these North Korean refugees to hold on to and to continue to grow in their faith even after they arrive.

There are currently a few mid- to mega-size South Korean churches that minister specifically to North Korean refugees, such as Onnuri, Youngrak, Sarang, Ansan Dongsan, NamSeoul, Yeido Full Gospel Church, God's Will Mission (Yu, 2008), and Gyung-Hyang. In addition, there are over 15 churches that are led by ordained North Korean refugee pastors (Yoo, 2012).

With these churches and Christian organizations already in action, it is important to understand how they can be more effective in aiding the North Korean refugees in their faith and adjustment process. Ministry to North Korean refugees can also lay the foundations for understanding how we can effectively evangelize North Koreans after Unification.

The role of the church is especially important to adolescent refugees since one of the critical developmental tasks of adolescents are to develop their sense of identity, part of which is related to religion. Ado-

lescents are more open to accepting religious beliefs as they search for role models and guidance to find meaning in their lives and understand who they are. With this in mind, the church's ministry to adolescent refugees should be approached on multiple levels: individual and organizational. The church needs to provide education and programs to the individual as well as work with other churches and organizations.

### *Individual Level*

There are many ways that the church can aid both adolescent refugees and South Korean church members.

*Develop a systematic curriculum for adolescent refugees.* For one, it is crucial that they develop a systematic curriculum that takes into account the specific culture and developmental stages of North Korean adolescents (Yoo, 2005). Adolescent refugees grew up in an anti-religious culture that had either a negative or no understanding of religion (Jeon & Cho, 2003; Yoo, 2005). In fact, many North Korean refugees hear about religion for the very first time during their journey to South Korea while staying in third countries (Jeon & Cho, 2003). Almost all people or organizations that help during this journey are religious, and thus some North Korean refugees accept Christianity during their stay in third countries (Cho, 2009; Jeon & Cho, 2003). However, due to their cultural background, they need systematic guidance for their faith to continue to grow once they arrive in South Korea (Yoo, 2005).

Philosophy of "Juche" (주체) and "Daily Life Unity" (생활총화) are two other cultural aspects the church needs to understand in order to develop an appropriate curriculum for these adolescent refugees. "Juche" is a political ideology of Kim Il-Sung that says that the people of North Korea are the master of the country's development (Lee, 2003; Yoo, 2005; see Lee, 2003 for a detailed review of "Juche"). "Juche" justifies idolizing Kim Il-Sung and the hereditary succession of power to Kim Jung-Il (Yoo, 2005) and now to Kim Jung-Eun. Due to the similarities with "Juche" and religion, research found that the political philosophy of "Juche" can either work for or against the refugees in their acceptance of religion (Yoo, 2005). Thus, the philosophy of "Juche" needs to be examined against Christianity in the process of developing the curriculum.

Experience with "Daily Life Unity," which refers to North Korea's mandatory weekly routine or ritual of criticizing oneself in front of a group of people, can also be an obstacle for North Korean refugees' adjustment to the Korean church setting. Case in point, the practice of sharing their daily life in small groups in church can remind them of their weekly routine in the North, thereby preventing the experience

to be a spiritual and positive one (Jeon & Cho, 2003, E. Kim, personal communication, March 3, 2013). Thus, the leader needs be cautious that the structure of sharing within small groups should not be seen as a replication of “Daily Life Unity” and a time of routine self-criticism.

*Provide opportunities to interact with South Korean peers: youth group and mentor-mentee programs.* One of the difficulties adolescent refugees face is making friends. The negative stereotypes and daily language barriers they face do not make this process easier. Research shows that adolescent refugees have a more difficult time to adjust when they have fewer South Korean friends. The church can help adolescent refugees by providing opportunities for them to interact with South Korean peers. For instance, the church can strongly encourage adolescent refugees to actively participate in youth group programs. In addition, structured mentor-mentee programs that pair an adolescent refugee with a South Korean peer can provide opportunities to interact and, hopefully, develop friendships. The increased frequency of interaction with South Korean counterparts could also help the adolescent refugees overcome language barriers.

*Exposure to role-models.* Since adolescents seek role-models in the process of developing their sense of identity, the church can hold special lectures by North Korean young-adult refugees who have successfully adjusted to their new environment, such as college graduates. Inviting adolescent refugees to stay with South Korean families during national holidays can also provide role-models of Christian families. This will be especially helpful for adolescent refugees who do not live with their own parents.

### ***Organization Level***

*Educate South Korean churches and their members on North Korean refugees and North Korea.* Churches and their members need to be educated on the facts and current situations of North Korean refugees. Education can help remove negative stereotypes and elicit interest and support for refugees (Jeong, 2010). For youth groups, hosting special seminars or workshops on North Korean refugees or on North Korea and peace can help create an open and safe environment for adolescent refugees. Adolescent refugees can play an active role in both preparing and presenting these seminars and workshops. This can provide opportunities for South Korean peers to learn from adolescent refugees.

*Establish a network among churches and organizations working with North Korean refugees.* In 2012, churches and organizations run by the North Korean refugee Christians came together to establish the Christian Council of North Korea (Jung, 2012; Seo, 2012). Their goal was, and

still is, to evangelize North Korean refugees in South Korea as well as to lay the foundation for ministering to North Koreans after unification (Jung, 2012; Seo, 2012). Establishment of the Christian Council of North Korea is indeed encouraging. We need to expand such networks so that churches and Christian organizations working with North Korean refugees can unite and exchange resources and mission strategies (Jeong, 2010).

Sponsor organizations or institutions that help North Korean refugees. There are many different institutions and organizations in different fields that are helping North Korean refugees. For instance, in education there are schools that are targeted specifically for North Korean refugee youths such as Heavenly Dream School (하늘꿈학교), Yeomyung School (여명학교), Great Vision School (한꿈학교), Jayoutuh (자유터학교), HanGeoRae Middle and High school (한겨레중고등학교), Gyoereul School (겨레얼학교), and Three Four School (셋넷학교). There are also a few afterschool study centers called Gongbubang (공부방) for North Korean refugee youths (Ahn, 2012; Lee, 2012; Lee, 2011). Churches and Christian organizations can support and sponsor such organizations in many different aspects including financial and prayer support.

*Represent adolescent refugees to the government and society.* Governmental policies and support for North Korean refugees focus mostly on adults. The church needs to advocate the needs of adolescent refugees to both the government and society. They need to push for systematic support and policies to be in place. They also need to take part in creating a culture that values adolescent refugees.

## Conclusion

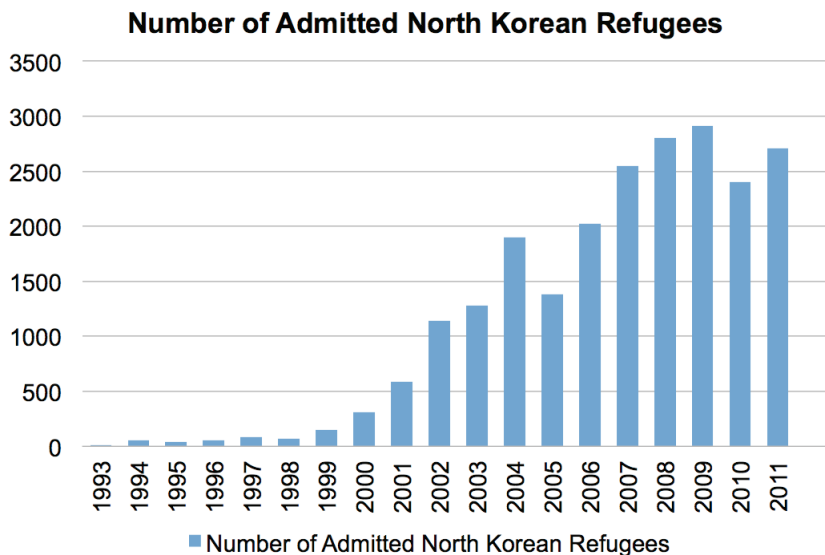
The number of North Korean adolescent refugees is growing in South Korea. They, along with other adolescents, will play a major role in leading Korea in the near future. Their adjustment to South Korean society is important both on the individual and societal level. However, as this article have discussed, these adolescent refugees face many obstacles and it is vital to provide appropriate help. Help can come in many forms, such as further research that leads to policies and systems that are tailored specifically to the North Korean adolescent refugee population.

Although there is an increase in studies on adolescent refugees, it is still much less than that of adult refugees. Further studies are needed to investigate the different variables related to adjustment as well as the different variables that may function as a mediator or moderator in their adjustment.

Currently, policies, resources, and systems provided to aid the adjustment process for North Korean refugees are focused mainly on

adults (Lee et al., 2003). The government needs to provide comprehensive and multifaceted policies and systematic structures that are specifically tailored to the adolescent refugees. For instance, since the current educational system is not sufficient for adolescent refugees, other alternatives need to be strengthened. These policies and systems need to address the many aspects of these adolescents' lives, such as family, school/education, and community. Additionally, policies and systems need to address prevention, intervention, and follow-up. Churches will also need to actively pursue and integrate the refugee population into their congregation by helping them both on the individual and organizational level.

Figure 1. Number of admitted North Korea refugees to South Korea from the year 1993 to 2011



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