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Dual Frames of Reference and Corruption: Unpacking North Korean Defectors' Views on Criminal Justice

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2024 Research & Creative Activity Day Faculty Oral Presentation

Dual Frames of Reference and Corruption: Unpacking North Korean Defectors'
Views on Criminal Justice

Jaeyong Choi
West Chester University

April 17th, 2024 (Wednesday)

Overview

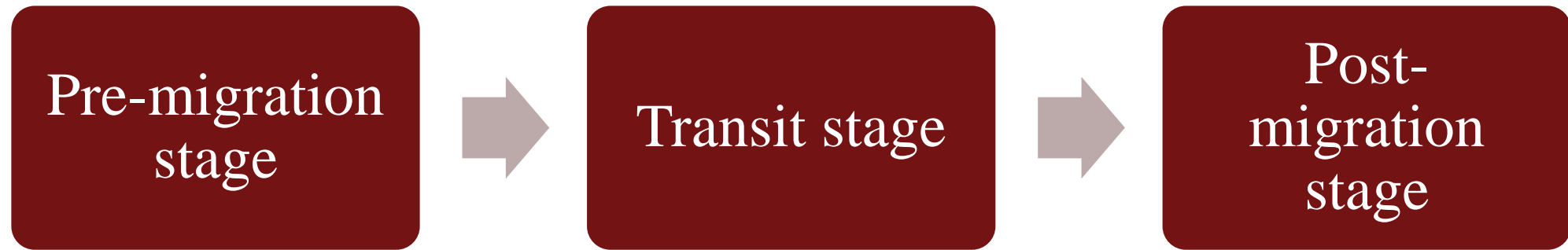
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Introduction

- **How many refugees are in the world?**
 - According to the UN's World Migration Report 2022, nearly 90 million in 2020 (about 1.1% of the world population) were displaced people who were expelled, deported, or impelled to leave their home countries.
 - Among them are nearly 32.5 million refugees.
- **Who are North Korean defectors?**
 - North Koreans who have escaped the country to seek better lives.
 - It is estimated that there are more than 33,000 North Koreans who live in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2023).

Introduction

- **Migration stages of North Korean defectors**



Introduction

- **A significant portion of North Korean refugees report mental health issues.**
 - About 12% of North Korean refugees had PTSD, whereas about 1% of the general Korean population had it (K. E. Lee et al., 2020).
- **The current status of the literature**
 - There is a growing body of empirical literature documenting complicated humanitarian emergencies among refugees.
 - Little is known regarding crime victimization among refugees at pre-migration and transit countries and its impact on perceptions of crime and police in their host societies.

Literature Review

North Korean defectors and perceptions of crime

Acculturation may be an important factor for understanding perceptions of crime among North Korean defectors (Grubb & Bouffard, 2014; Lee & Ulmer, 2000; Luo & Zhao, 2017; Wu & Wen, 2014; Yun et al., 2010).

- Acculturation refers to the process that occurs when individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds engage in ongoing direct interaction, leading to alterations in the original cultural norms of one or both groups (Redfield et al., 1936).
- Both empirical research and accounts from defectors highlight the significant acculturative stress experienced by North Koreans (Choi et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Song & Denney, 2019; Yu et al., 2012).
- Crime victimization among North Korean defectors at pre-migration, transit, and post-migration stages

Literature Review

North Korean defectors and perceptions of the police

1. North Korean defectors may assess their lives in the host society through the lens of their past encounters with crime and the criminal justice system in North Korea (Sun & Wu, 2018).
2. The social connections North Korean defectors establish in the host society play a crucial role in shaping their perspectives on crime and law enforcement, serving as a vital source of information (Ackah, 2000).
3. North Korean defectors' direct encounters with crime and the justice system in the host society directly impact their current perceptions of crime and law enforcement (Choi, 2019).

Current Study

My main research question is:

- **How do the experiences of North Korean defectors in both their home country (North Korea), transit country, and their host society (South Korea) influence their perspectives on crime and law enforcement?**

Methodology: Sampling

Sample

- Sampling Strategy: Snowball sampling
 - In 2024, a gatekeeper to introduce me to the organization for North Korean defectors
 - I attended the meetings that I could find potential study participants.
 - Only participants older than 18 years old were recruited.
 - Two individuals agreed to participate in an interview.
 - The in-depth interviews took place in the location of the participants' choice.

Methodology: Measures

Participant	Current Age	Age at Defection	Gender	Duration of Stay in China	Transit Country	Duration of Stay in Transit Country	Marital Status	Children
Participant 1	54	38	Female	8 years	Outer Mongolia	3 months	Married	None
Participant 2	37	23	Male	1-2 months	China	1-2 months	Unmarried	None

Results

Perception of Crime in South Korea

- Both participants express a sense of safety and security in South Korea. They highlight the belief that crime is relatively low, and they feel comfortable living without significant concerns about criminal activities.

Perception of Crime in North Korea

- Both interviewees recall experiences from North Korea where crime was not a significant concern for them personally. They mention a lack of trust in law enforcement and an understanding that seeking help from authorities often led to disappointment unless bribes were involved.

Results

Trust in South Korean Police

- Both participants generally trust the police in South Korea. They appreciate personal interactions with police officers, which positively influence their perception of law enforcement. They believe that the South Korean police uphold democratic values and use their authority appropriately.

Distrust in North Korean Authorities

- Both interviewees express distrust toward authorities in North Korea. They describe instances of arbitrary actions, lack of respect for legal procedures, and a tendency to abuse power. Seeking assistance from North Korean authorities often resulted in disappointment unless bribes were offered.

Results

Direct Experience with South Korean Police

- Unlike Participant 1, Participant 2 has had multiple encounters with South Korean police as both a victim and a suspect in various incidents, including drug-related offenses, minor assaults, and drunk driving. However, he still maintained trust in the South Korean police, citing respectful treatment and adherence to legal procedures during interactions.
- After settling in South Korea, Participant 1 experienced various fraudulent schemes, including illegal multi-level marketing. She expressed significant concern about fraud-related crimes. However, she felt less worried about physical crimes like assault or threats.

Conclusion: Significance of the Study

Summary of the findings

- Three key findings emerged
 - First, personal experiences have a more significant impact on shaping North Korean defectors' perception of crime and police than others' opinions or media influences.
 - Second, despite some unpleasant situations, participants felt that South Korean police respect their rights and use their authority appropriately.
 - Third, corruption played a significant role in eroding trust in the police force in North Korea.

Conclusion: Limitations

Research Implications

- Ensuring procedural justice is essential for fostering positive attitudes towards the police among North Korean defectors.
- Perceptions of crime and law enforcement in North Korea can influence perceptions of crime and law enforcement in other contexts by providing a frame of reference.

Recommendations and areas for future research

- Further research is necessary to comprehend perceptions of crime and law enforcement among refugees outside the United States.
- Increasing the sample size is crucial to enhance the validity of the study's findings.

Questions, Concerns, and Discussion

Thank-You