The Effects of Explicit and Implicit Self-esteem and of Meaning in Life on Posttraumatic Growth in North Korean Defectors

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Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine how explicit and implicit self-esteem and the Meaning in Life affect the post-traumatic growth of North Korean defectors. This study also aims to investigate the occurrence of the post-traumatic growth process.

Methods: The participants were 61 North Korean defectors (9 men and 47 women). After taking the IAT (Implicit association test), each participant completed the post-traumatic growth inventory, Rosenberg’s self-esteem inventory, the Meaning in Life inventory, and the traumatic experience questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed by correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis.

Results: First, explicit and implicit self-esteem show significant effects on post-traumatic growth, where implicit self-esteem affects the post-traumatic growth more than explicit self-esteem. Second, the Meaning in Life mediates the effects of self-esteem on post-traumatic growth. Third, the interaction between explicit and implicit self-esteem doesn’t show significant effects on post-traumatic growth. The results suggest that psychological intervention is as important as financial support for adaptation of North Korean defectors to South Korean society. Furthermore, these results can be applied as useful data in mental health to help North Korean defectors overcome trauma and establish psychological growth.

Keywords: North Korean Defector, Posttraumatic Growth, Implicit Association Test (IAT)