

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.

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North Korean Defectors Settled in South Korea

Survey on Torture Victims

Report by

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Table of Contents

General characteristics

Confinement conditions

Torture conditions

Reality of post-traumatic effects of torture

Conclusions

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General characteristics

While analyzing thorough individual interviews from September to November of 2005 with thirty North Korean defectors currently living in South Korea, it appeared that all interviewees (100%) answered they had been victims of torture.

The sample comprised 18 women (60%) and 12 men (40%); 10 people were in their 30's (33%), 7 in their 40's (23%), 5 in their 50's (17%), and 4 in their 20's (13%), which makes an average age of 38.2 years.

Eighteen of the North Koreans (60%) defected between 1996 and 2000, 11 after 2001 (37%), and 1 before 1990 (3%). Sixty-three percent of interviewees fled from North Korea twice, once (33%), and more than three times (4%). All interviewees stated they had lived temporarily in China.

The average time that the North Korean defectors spent trying to enter South Korea was 1.6 years. For those with two defection attempts or more, the motive for the first attempt was financial need (57%), political oppression (37%), on request of their family already settled in South Korea (3%), out of curiosity for the free world (3%). The motive for the second attempt or more was political oppression (90%) and financial need (10%).

Confinement conditions

1) Location of confinement

All the interviewees (100%) were detained in premises of the National Security Military Agency (enemy/spy section interrogation room and prison cell in Shinuiju, Onseong, Musan). Eighty percent the interviewees spent time in a labor/detention gathering center before being sentenced (Cheongjin, Nongpo, Shinuiju, Onseong, Hoeryeong). Three percent also spent time in a long-term prison labor camp (Hoeryeong) and in a domestic affairs center (Gimchaek), 3% in the 9.27 *Cotjebi* (orphan) concentration camp, 3% in a political penal labor colony (Yodeok), 10% in a Chinese border detention facility (Domun, Hwaryong), 13% in a social safety agency (Onsung, Wiyeon, Hoeryong, Saebyeol), and 3% in a people's safety agency.

2) Period of confinement

Concerning the total period of confinement, 47% of the interviewees were for 3-6 months, 33% for less than 3 months, 10% for 6-12 months, 10 % for more than 12 months. The average period of confinement per person was 6 months and 7 days.

3) Frequency of confinement

Concerning the number of periods of confinement in one of the aforementioned facilities, 71% of the interviewees were for once, 13% for more than 9 times, 10% for 3-4 times,, 3% for 5-6 times, and 3% for 7-8 times. The average frequency of confinement per the interviewee was 3.8 times.

Torture conditions

The definition of torture we used in this report is ‘an action carried out on the orders of a superior that inflicts physical, mental injuries to a person in a confinement facility’.

1) Torturers

All the interviewees (100%) said to have been tortured by a National Security Agency officers (enemy spy instructor, criminal investigation secretary, prison security guard). 87% by prison cell guards, 73% by social security police, and 40% by labor detention facility safety guards before sentenced, 3% by labor/detention facility guards after sentenced.

2) Duration of torture

Fifty-one percent of the interviewees answered they were tortured for 30 days, 23% for 31-60 days, 13% for 61-120 days and 13% for over 120 days. Average duration of torture was 2 months and 8 days.

3) Frequency of torture

Sixty-one percent of the interviewees were tortured Less than 20 times, 20% for 21-40 times, 3 % for 41-60 times, 3% for 61-80 times, 13% for over 80 times

4) Reasons for torture

Ninety-seven percent of the interviewees were for their contacts with South Koreans and their stay in China, 63% for possession of Chinese currency, 6% for religious activities (reading the Bible, praying etc.), 3% for debauchery, 3% for singing South Korean songs and watching South Korean movies, 100% for lack of cooperation during interrogation and labor in prison camps.

5) Types of torture

In this study, we used the torture technique checklist (*Torture: the Grave of Human Rights*, written by KRCT, Hangeyora Publishing: Seoul, 2004, p.69-71). The checklist was originally derived from the Istanbul Protocol and the books published by the IRCT (International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims) in 1992, 1995, 1997. Total number of torture types was 97: 25 types of physical torture and 72 types of psychological torture (sexual torture, a mixed type of torture, was classified as psychological torture in the checklist).

All respondents (100%) were subjected to both physical and psychological torture. Twenty-five types of psychological torture and 4 types of physical torture were experienced by each defector. Twenty-nine different types of torture in total were experienced by each defector.

(1) Physical torture

Some types of physical torture that the interviewees experienced were as follows: All the respondents said that they endured forced labor until they were on the verge of losing

consciousness. They experienced forced non-physiological position called 'Dog house torture', beating with square wood sticks (5-7 cm in Diameter: full-body beating, wound beating, feet beating) kicking abdomen with feet (esp. pregnant women who have Chinese husbands for inducing abortion), dental torture, suspension torture called 'Pigeon torture (the victim is hung up by his/her feet and hands)', electrical torture with the use of electrical needles, suffocation torture by submersion in water and other dirty liquid solutions, sitting and standing repeatedly until losing consciousness called 'Pump training torture', burning torture with cigarette butts. Among them 'Dog house torture' was reported as the worst one which maximum endurance hour was only 15 hours and body apart. The torture techniques were used mainly by torturers but frequently by other defectors forcefully joined by torturers.

Among them, 100% of the interviewees endured beatings, 50% endured forced postures, 23% burning, 17% being hung up, 13% suffocation torture, 10% electrical torture, 10% experienced dental torture, and 3% experienced physical mutilation other than genitals. Pump training torture was even not in the checklist, which was the unique technique developed in North Korea in order to search Chinese currency in women's genitals and men's anus.

(2) Psychological torture

The types of psychological torture that defectors endured were deprivation, coercion, misuse of communication, and sexual torture. All the respondents (100%) had experienced deprivation and coercion torture; 83% misuse of communication torture; 57% sexual torture; 13% also mentioned drug and mental hospital abuse torture.

A. Deprivation tortures

All the interviewees (100%) endured deprivation of food and hygiene; 97% experienced sensory deprivation and deprivation of medical services; 87% experienced perception deprivation; 80% social deprivation, and 77% sleep deprivation.

Social deprivation means imprisonment, confinement in a mental hospital, alienation from friends and family, obstruction to education by expulsion from schools or dismissal from work, and obstruction to cultural, political, religious activities.

Sensory deprivation means being locked in a dark room or sitting under bright lights & blinking lights, being head covered, being hand cuffed, and impeding physical activity by various means.

Perception deprivation intentionally curtails or blocks communication with the outside world through censorship of letters, books, telephone calls, newspapers, radio, and television, and also hinders or prohibits the victim's ability to keep any notion of time and date.

Sleep deprivation means periodically waking the victim so that it is impossible for them to get sufficient sleep. Deprivation of food means lacking of amount of food with poor nutritional value, or contaminated food.

Deprivation of hygiene consists in providing inappropriate clothing (esp. sanitary napkin for menstrual women), not allowing the changing of clothes, and providing insufficient opportunities to wash one's body and clothes.

Deprivation of medical services means inappropriate medical care or absence of medical care for the sick including exposing defectors to excessive cold temperature, humidity, microorganisms and insects without adequate protection in foul-smelling, filthy environments.

B. Coercion tortures

Ninety percent of the interviewees were confronted with impossible choices or acts against their will, and 67% were coerced into submission.

Being forced to make impossible choices or acting against one's will consists of revealing information, signing false confessions, witnessing torture passively in helpless situations (forcing miscarriage of a baby by kicking a pregnant woman in the abdomen or watching and helping infanticides by upside down choking as soon as born), and forcefully carrying out profanation activities. Intimidation includes direct threats to the victim; threats that the victim will be disabled for life; mock executions; and threats against his/her family or relatives.

C. Misuse of communication

Eighty-three percent of the interviewees of misuse of communication underwent the reverse-effect technique, 60% the contrary information technique, 60% double-restraint technique, 27% sensorial distortion, and 20% the conditioned reflex techniques.

Tortured defectors who experienced the misuse of communication techniques were exposed to the reverse-effect technique—an interrogator contradicts whatever the torture victim states. Double-restraint techniques consist in forcing someone to take an impossible decision. The contrary information technique (good man and bad man technique) consists in communicating well-meant information after violent torture. Conditioned reflex techniques are used to make the victim lose all notions of time and space intentionally. Obstructing letters, books and newspapers or other media and imposing unconditional submission are part of the misuse of communication.

D. Drug and mental hospital abuse technique

Twelve percent of the defectors were subjected to drug and mental hospital abuse; 6% endured toxic drug abuse, and 6% were locked up in a mental hospital with unknown shots every day.

E. Sexual Torture

Sixty-three percent of the interviewees suffered sexual torture, 57% of them were subjected to genital torture with an instrument, and 6% were victims of human sexual violence. 100% of the interviewees underwent psychological sexual disgrace,

The interviewees suffered two types of sexual torture: genital torture with an instrument and sexual violence perpetrated by a human being. The following instruments were used

for genital torture: a rod or a whip to beat the genitalia, a police rod, a stick, forceps, and hands to be introduced in the vagina in order to searching Chinese currency. In cases of sexual violence committed by a human being, the defectors were raped and mishandled by their torturers.

For psychological sexual humiliation, the torturers use various techniques: verbal and disparaging techniques, humiliating language, stripping, forced into disgraceful positions (for example, using pincers or hands to take out money from genitals), forced to watch the sexual torture of another person.

Reality of post-traumatic effects of torture

For this study, we used the after-effects of torture checklist (*Torture: the Grave of Human Rights*, written by KRCT, Hangeora Publishing: Seoul, 2004, p.143, 149). The checklist was originally derived from the Istanbul Protocol and the books published by the IRCT in 1992, 1995, 1997 (International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims).

There are 121 different types of post-traumatic disorders: 72 types of physical, 41 types of psychological, and 8 types of social economical after-effects of torture.

All the interviewees experienced both physical and psychological post-traumatic effects (100%), and socioeconomic effects (70%).

Each defector suffered from on average 29 different types of after-effects of torture: 14.8 physical post-traumatic effects, 11.9 psychological post-traumatic effects, and 2.4 different types of socioeconomic after-effects of torture.

1) Physical post-traumatic effects of torture

Each defector suffered from on average 13.0 different types of chronic post-traumatic effects and of 1.8 acute post-traumatic effects of torture.

Fifty percent of the victims who suffered from acute physical post-traumatic effects had external wounds; 40% had broken bones; 30% had concussions; 23% had vascular damage or nerve paralysis; 6% had burns; another 6% had haematoma; and 3% had joint dislocation.

Ninety-three percent of the interviewees who suffer from chronic physical post-traumatic effects have digestive problems (stomach ulcer, hepatitis, loss of appetite, weight loss, constipation, etc.); 83% have muscle and bone problems (disabilities due to change of physical structure, muscular pains, nerve paralysis, fatigue, chest pains, etc.); 80% have central and peripheral nervous system problems (migraine, concussions, damage to vascular nerves, paralysis of peripheral senses, etc.) 63% have dental problems (abrasion of teeth, damage of teeth, inability to chew food properly, etc.) 47% have nose, ear, throat problems (hearing, vertigo, tinnitus, rupture of eardrum, etc.); 47% have skin problems (burn related to exposing sun after eating poisoned grass roots for hunger pain, skin wounds, scars, etc.); 40% have lung and heart problems (tuberculosis related to malnutrition and asthma - pain in pit of stomach, palpitation, breathing difficulties, etc.); 27% have urinary or genital problems (urinary, women's pelvic pains, and cervical & uterine cancer somewhat related to prostitute lifestyle during hiding in China, etc.); 23% have eye problems (diplopia, etc).

2) Psychological post-traumatic effects

Each defector suffered from on average 7.2 different types of chronic post-traumatic effects and of 4.7 acute post-traumatic effects.

Concerning acute psychological post-traumatic effects, 87% of the interviewees answered they had emotional disorders (terror, anxiety, depression, feeling of guilt from leaving their families in North Korea, shame, humiliation, loss of self-respect, loss of trust, double personalities). 73% claimed to have abnormal cognitive reactions (acute brain trouble syndrome: confusion, loss of concentration, inability to control a situation, loss of awareness, loss of sense of reality, state of misinformation, hallucination after unknown shots in mental hospitals). 17% suffered from adaptation skills.

Concerning chronic post-traumatic effects that were experienced, 73% of the interviewees suffered from cognitive disorder (memory loss except of torture, loss of concentration, inability to learn or to read), 77% emotional disorder (nightmares, hopelessness, evasion, repeated experience of torture, neurosis, panic attacks, severe anxiety, depression, isolation from society, autism), 63% peripheral nerve disability (decrease in physical energy, decrease in sexual function, sudden perspiration), 60% personality disorder (changes of human nature, distrust, loss of self awareness, distrust of other people), 53% hypochondria (feeling psychological pain as chronic migraines, indigestion, muscle tension, or heart trouble), 33% caught in the role of victim (severe victimization, constant nightmares or caught in painful memories), 10% daydreaming (absorbed in exaggerated thoughts, religion, or magical world), and 10% projection (turning one's destructive urges against a torturer toward family members).

3) Socioeconomic post-traumatic effects

Each of the interviewees suffered from average 1.7 different types of socioeconomic problems such as unemployment due to illness and disability, lack of job skills, difficulty in establishing social relationships, difficulty in communication, and maladjustment to South Korean society.

Each of the interviewees suffered from average 0.6 different type of family trouble due to unemployment, poverty, disintegration of family, inability to maintain marriage life,

Seventy percent of the interviewees suffered from socioeconomic post-traumatic effects of torture. Sixty-three percent of them suffered from family trouble.

5. Post-traumatic effects to solve

All interviewees (100%) would like to be cured of medical, psychological, and economical aftereffects of torture. 35% of them would like to be cured of legal problem, 42.5 % of them would like to be cured of social and family problem.

6. Interviewees' suggestions to resolve post-traumatic effects

Seventy percent of the interviewees mention medical treatment for mental and physical illness and 18% psychological counselling for psychological comfort. For this, they would like to have Korean government support for long-term professional intervention such as

establishment of rehabilitation centers and the designation of a specialized hospital for North Korean defectors. Six percent of them also hope for more employment and economic support.

Conclusions

There are 7,400 defectors settled in South Korea by 2005. About four hundreds of them were dead from illness or migrated to other countries. About 80% of them (5,632 in number) were subjected to torture, which means defected more than once to China from North Korea. Most of them had crossed over to China pushed by food shortage for the first trial and by political oppression such as torture for the second trial, The defectors begun to be treated inhumanely in detention facilities at the Chinese border by Chinese patrol guards. After being deported to North Korea, they underwent serious torture experience in various prison camps of North Korea.

The torture was justified by the claim that defection was treason against North Korean people even though reasons were alleged contacts with South Koreans, stay in China, and religious activities. The underlying reason seems to be defection as political acting against the autocratic Kim Jong-Il regime. It also seems that through the kind of torture that was inflicted - forced labor, pump training imposed upon women, use of forceps or hands to pull out money possibly hidden in their genital organ or anus to extort money – the another reason of torture was related to economic constraint.

Now, these victims of intense torture suffer from severe mental and physical post-traumatic effects of torture, which seem to be worst than the ones experienced by Cambodian refugees in 1979. These consequences seriously jeopardize the resettlement and the integration of North Korean defectors in South Korea.

Therefore, this survey strongly suggests the need for international organizations, such as the UN, to urge China to put an end to the *return of defectors to North Korea*.

Furthermore, this study suggests that the Chinese government accepts North Korean defectors as political refugees and protects them against inhumane treatment by Chinese patrol guards and by torturers in North Korea. .

Finally, we ask the UN, the Korean government, and medical professionals to help North Korean defectors who are suffering from all kinds of after-effects of torture so that they may defect once more from their sick bodies in order to settle safely and live as healthy new citizens of South Korea and other free countries.

The KRCT needs more funding for the rehabilitation of the increasing number of North Korean victims of torture. Those who want to help can contact them at the following address:

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