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Corresponding author  
E-mail: [3academy4840@army.mil.kr](mailto:3academy4840@army.mil.kr)

Peer reviewer  
E-mail: [editor@j-institute.jp](mailto:editor@j-institute.jp)

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## A Study on Psychological Perceptions toward NORTH KOREAN Defector for PROTECTION

Song Kyung-jae<sup>1</sup>

*Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon, Yeongchoen, Republic of Korea*

Lee Sang-bong<sup>2\*</sup>

*Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon, Yeongchoen, Republic of Korea*

### Abstract

*As the number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea has dramatically increased, various efforts have been made to settle them as members of the society. These days, the military is also positively considering military duties for North Korean defectors in line with current social movements. However, prejudice and a sense of distance towards North Korean defectors may act as negative factors in military operations. To solve this problem, the military needs to exert effort to lessen the prejudice and sense of distance towards North Korean defectors, in preparation for the latter and their second generation in joining the army.*

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the prejudice of army soldiers on North Korean defectors by examining the effects of individual psychological traits (authoritarian personality, inclination to perfectionism, empathic ability) on prejudice (stereotypes, emotions, sense of social distance) towards North Korean defectors. A survey was carried out targeting four hundred soldiers from various units ranging from front to rear troops, representing the entire army.*

*To summarize the results of this study, efforts are needed among the army in reducing their authoritarian personality, enhancing self-oriented perfectionism, and improving empathic ability to lessen the prejudice towards North Korean defectors. To do this, public advertisements and social programs (prejudice and stereotype mitigating program) must be created for soldiers to learn other cultures and positively embrace social minority groups. Through this study, the presentation of the policy making plan on recognition improvement towards North Korean defectors may be considered as an achievement.*

**[Keywords]** North Korean Defectors, Authoritarian Personality, Perfectionism, Prejudices, Protection

## 1. Introduction

As the number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea has dramatically increased, various efforts have been made to settle them as members of the society. These days, the military is also positively considering military duties for North Korean defectors in line with current social movements. In addition, an enactment was done to allow the special appointment of North Korean soldiers subject to protection to be transferred in the South Korean Army if they want to (Lee & Kim, 2016)[1]. However, the Military Service Act stipulates that North

Korean defectors can be exempted from military service without undergoing physical examination if they desire. There is no official information on the military service exemption scale of North Korean defectors (Oh & Jeong, 2013)[2].

According to the statistics on the North Korean defectors policy of the Ministry of National Unification, the number of North Korean defectors steadily entering South Korea is about 1,500 people per year (Ministry of National Unification, 2017)[3]. The second generations of North Korean defectors, who entered between the

late 1990s to the early 2000s, are approaching their time in joining the military. In accordance with the Military Service Act mentioned above, North Korean defectors are exempted from military service. However, second generation defectors are subject to joining the military. In preparation for the increasing number of North Korean defectors and a true social integration, and by extension, a reunification of two countries, the military needs to prepare more actively for cases of North Korean defectors and their second generation joining the military. The first thing that needs to be done is to lessen the prejudice and sense of distance towards North Korean defectors.

The prejudice and sense of distance towards North Korean defectors can act as negative factors for military operations. When the American military had a sense of distance and prejudice towards Sunni due to lack of appropriate understanding, the Iraqi stabilization campaign did not succeed during its early stages which resulted to their loss of combat power. As the military is an organization that exists in preparation for war, if the prejudice and sense of distance on North Korean defectors are not solved, psychological inconvenience such as a sense of difference and resistance on North Koreans will negatively influence the country's military civil operations.

This research intends to analyze the perception of army soldiers on North Korean defectors and examine the effect of individual psychological traits (authoritarianism, perfectionism, empathy) on prejudice (stereotype, emotion, sense of social distance) towards North Korean defectors. Through this, a policy and intervention plan for military soldiers that lessens prejudice and induces a positive perception on North Korean defectors is being sought for.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Authoritarian personality**

Authoritarianism has the duality of domination and submission. It makes a person

become obedient to power and authority but at the same time, motivates one to get power and rule over the weak. Adorno et al.(1950) said that authoritarian personality is the same with prejudice on many minority groups and a kind of sentiment on authority[4]. Here, the obedience on the superior, the asperity on the inferior, and the belief that authority and rule is important are said to be included. Also, Maslow(1970) mentions authoritarian tendency, desire for authority, hatred for the enemy, prejudice, external judgement, stinginess of kindness, inclination in considering human as other means, sense of guilt, and conflict as the attributes of authoritarian personality[5].

Many studies on the nature of authoritarian personality have shown that it has the characteristic of evading cognitive rigidity and uncertainty(Block & Block, 1951)[6]. It rejects minority groups, has a conservative political, economic attitude, and embraces the attitude of power and authority(Izzertt, 1971)[7]. In addition, based on various studies on the relationship between authoritarian personality and prejudice, people with high authoritarian tendencies were shown to have prejudice towards the black, women, homosexuals(Whitley, 1998)[8], disabled(Noonan, Barry, & Davis, 1970)[9], and AIDS patients(Cunningham, Dollinger, Satz, & Rotter, 1991)[10].

### **2.2. Inclination to perfectionism**

Perfectionism is a tendency to set a high standard for oneself by suppressing and controlling oneself to reach this standard. Hyun(1992) stated that the higher the inclination to perfectionism, the higher the level of anxiety is, denoting a positive correlation between the two[11]. Choi(1998) stated that the relationship between the inclination to perfectionism and anxiety show a positive correlation[12]. In addition, Ha(2013) found out that perfectionists show a negative attitude towards multicultural families which belong to the social minority group as they do not seem like a socially perfect structure[13]. As a result, the viewpoint for North Korean defectors who have the characteristics of a social minority group may be re-

flected in negative attitudes and prejudice even in the military.

### 2.3. Empathy

Empathy is the ability of a person to feel the emotions and experiences of others from the latter's viewpoint (Marsumoto, 2000) [14]. The ability to empathize with others contributes to a wide range of interpersonal relations, social relationship, and diverse abilities. Empathic ability becomes the foundation in forming personal relationships and helps in various issues such as solving conflicts or coping with stress. Also, Johnson (1990) stated that empathy is helpful in making interpersonal relations better and resolving conflict productively [15]. People with high empathy are found to be friendlier and have a higher helping behavior towards minority groups compared to several groups.

### 2.4. The prejudice towards North Korean defectors

Prejudice is a lopsided thinking which is not fair. Generally, prejudice has a negative influence on social life whether it is true or not (Park & Chung, 2006) [16]. Especially in the case of the military, considering it is an organization where unity and cooperation is important than any other organizations, prejudice against a specific group increases internal conflicts in the military and may lead to the decline of combat power (Choi, 2010) [17].

Looking at the study on prejudice towards North Korean defectors, it was shown that South Koreans have negative thoughts on directly becoming a family with North Korean defectors. However, in terms of building a relationship as friends or co-workers, South Koreans showed a positive attitude towards North Korean defectors. As mentioned above, South Koreans were shown to have ambivalence on North Korean defectors and in particular, they have noticeable prejudice in situations wherein they have to build a direct relationship with the latter.

In this research, prejudice towards North Korean defectors was explored by classifying

it into cognition, emotion, and behavior. For the cognitive aspect, stereotypes about North Korean defectors were examined. For the emotional aspect, prejudiced emotions towards North Korean defectors were looked into. Finally, for the behavioral aspect, the sense of social distance on North Korean defectors was measured.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1. Research model

In this study, the psychological traits of the individual (authoritarian personality, inclination to perfectionism, empathic ability) were set as independent variables and the dependent variable is the prejudice (stereotype, emotion, sense of social distance) on North Korean defectors. A research model was constructed in order to investigate the effect of these independent variables on the dependent variable.

### 3.2. Research subject

In this study, a survey was conducted among four hundred soldiers from various units ranging from front to rear areas, representing the whole army. First, the purpose of the survey was explained and then it was carried out with consent. The age range of the four hundred soldiers were from 19 to 26 years old with an average of 21.09 years old ( $SD=1.23$ ). The academic background was shown as 68 soldiers with high school education and below (17.0%), 102 soldiers with college education (25.5%), and 230 soldiers with university education (57.5%).

### 3.3. Measurements

#### 3.3.1. Authoritarian personality

The translated and modified Korean version of Authoritarian Personality Scale by Min (1989) [18], originally developed by Adorno et al. (1950) [4], was used to measure the authoritarianism of his father. The Korean version of the Authoritarian Personality Scale has a total of 35 items which are all composed of a 5-point-scale. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) in this study is 0.901.

### 3.3.2. Inclination to perfectionism

The Korean version of the Multi-dimensional Perfectionism Scale, MPS translated by Han(1993)[19] and modified by Jeon(2009)[20], originally developed by Hewitt & Flett(1991) was used. It covers the inclination to perfectionism in a personal basis and social basis[21]. There is a total of 45 items consisting of three sub-factors which are self-oriented perfectionism, others-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. The reliability coefficient(Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) in this study is 0.812.

### 3.3.3. Empathic ability

The test tool developed by Jeon(2002)[22] which he reconstructed based on the emotional sympathy criterion developed by Mehrabian & Epstein(1972)[23], and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index(IRI) test developed by Davis(1980)[24] were used. It is composed of a total of 30 items and the reliability coefficient(Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) in this study is 0.790.

### 3.3.4. The prejudice towards North Korean defectors

To measure the prejudice towards North Korean defectors, sections were classified into cognition, emotion, and behavior. For the cognitive and emotional aspect, the criterion of Yang(2009) was used in which the attitude on minority groups was modified into North Korean defectors[25]. On the other hand, for the behavioral aspect, the modified version of Kim et al.(2011)[26] based on a sense of social distance criterion developed by Bogardus(1925) was used[27]. The reliability coefficient(Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) in this study for cognitive prejudice was 0.780, 0.746 for emotional prejudice, and 0.783 for behavioral prejudice.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice towards North Korean defectors

As a result of analyzing the correlation between the sub-factors of authoritarianism and the prejudices towards North Korean defectors, it shows that the higher the scores of authoritarianism sub factors, the higher is the negative stereotypes and emotions towards North Korean defectors. Moreover, as the scores of some factors like conventionalism get higher, the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors increased as well.

### 4.2. The effect of perfectionism on the prejudices towards North Korean defectors

#### 4.2.1. The effect of perfectionism on the stereotypes of North Korean defectors

This research examined how the perfectionism of soldiers influences positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. The result, as seen in <Table 1>, showed that perfectionism has a 1.3% significant explanatory power on positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. In particular, self-oriented perfectionism among the sub factors of perfectionism had a statistically significant effect on positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. However, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism did not have statistically significant results. This means that the higher the self-oriented perfectionism of soldiers is, the stronger the positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors.

**Table 1.** The effect of perfectionism on the positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Positive stereotypes	.071	.025	.151	2.817**
Other-oriented perfectionism		-.044	.033	-.073	-1.338

Socially prescribed perfectionism		-.018	.034	-.027	-.529
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$R^2=.013$   $F(3, 396)=2.756^*$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ .

This study examined how the perfectionism of soldiers influences negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors. The results, as seen in <Table 2>, showed that perfectionism has an 11.8% significant explanatory power on negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors. In particular, self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism among the sub factors of perfection-

ism had a statistically significant effect on negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors. However, other-oriented perfectionism did not have statistically significant results. This means that the lower the self-oriented perfectionism or the higher the socially prescribed perfectionism of soldiers, the stronger the negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors is.

**Table 2.** The effect of perfectionism on the negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Negative stereotypes	-.113	.023	-.251	-4.959***
Other-oriented perfectionism		.032	.030	.056	1.092
Socially prescribed perfectionism		.180	.030	.290	5.975***

$R^2=.118$   $F(3, 396)=18.874^{***}$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ .

#### 4.2.2. The effect of perfectionism on the emotion towards North Korean defectors

The effect of the perfectionism of soldiers on the positive emotions towards North Korean defectors was examined. The result, as seen in <Table 3>, showed that perfectionism has a 5.9% significant explanatory power on the positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. In particular, self-oriented

perfectionism among the sub-factors of perfectionism had a statistically significant effect on positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. However, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism did not have statistically significant results. This means that the higher the self-oriented perfectionism of soldiers is, the stronger the positive emotion towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 3.** The effect of perfectionism on the positive emotions towards North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Positive emotions	.075	.014	.277	5.283***
Other-oriented perfectionism		-.033	.018	-.096	-1.803

Socially prescribed perfectionism		-.011	.019	-.030	-.589
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$$R^2=.059 F(3, 396)=9.315^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

The effect of the perfectionism of soldiers on compassion towards North Korean defectors was examined. The result, as seen in <Table 4>, showed that perfectionism has a 4.1% significant explanatory power on compassion towards North Korean defectors. In particular, self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism among the

sub-factors of perfectionism had a statistically significant effect on compassion towards North Korean defectors. However, other-oriented perfectionism did not have statistically significant results. This means that the higher the self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism of soldiers is, the stronger the compassion towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 4.** The effect of perfectionism on compassion towards North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Compassion	.051	.017	.160	3.026 <sup>***</sup>
Other-oriented perfectionism		-.001	.022	-.002	-.040
Socially prescribed perfectionism		.057	.022	.129	2.556 <sup>*</sup>

$$R^2=.041 F(3, 396)=6.715^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

This research examined how the perfectionism of soldiers influences negative emotions towards North Korean defectors. The result, as seen in <Table 5>, showed that perfectionism has an 11.3% significant explanatory power on negative emotions towards North Korean defectors. In particular, self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism among the sub-factors

of perfectionism had a statistically significant effect on negative emotions towards North Korean defectors. However, other-oriented perfectionism did not have statistically significant results. This means that the lower the self-oriented perfectionism and the higher the socially prescribed perfectionism of soldiers is, the stronger the negative emotions towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 5.** The effect of perfectionism on the negative emotions towards North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Negative emotions	-.077	.016	-.249	-4.901 <sup>***</sup>
Other-oriented perfectionism		.037	.021	.093	1.800
Socially prescribed perfectionism		.118	.021	.274	5.626 <sup>***</sup>

$$R^2=.113 F(3, 396)=17.939^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

### 4.2.3. The effect of perfectionism on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors

This study investigated how the perfectionism of soldiers influences a sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors. The result, as seen in <Table 6>, showed that perfectionism has a 5.7% significant explanatory power on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defec-

tors. In particular, self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism, which are the sub-factors of perfectionism, all had statistically significant effects on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors. This means that the lower the self-oriented perfectionism, and the higher the other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism of soldiers is, the stronger the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 6.** The effect of perfectionism on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defector (N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Self-oriented perfectionism	Social distance	-.147	.035	-.220	-4.207 <sup>***</sup>
Other-oriented perfectionism		.135	.046	.158	2.964 <sup>**</sup>
Socially prescribed perfectionism		.115	.046	.125	2.493 <sup>*</sup>
$R^2=.057 F(3, 396)=9.103^{***}$					

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

### 4.3. The effect of empathy on the prejudice towards North Korean defectors

#### 4.3.1. The effect of empathy on the stereotypes of North Korean defectors

This study examined how the empathy of soldiers influences positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors.

The result, as seen in <Table 7>, showed that empathy has a 4.4% significant explanatory power on positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. In particular, cognitive

empathy had a statistically significant effect on positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. However, emotional empathy did not have statistically significant results. This means that the better the cognitive empathy of soldiers is, the stronger the positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors. However, as a result of examining how the empathy of soldiers influences negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors, both cognitive and emotional empathy did not have statistically significant effects on the negative stereotypes of North Korean defectors.

**Table 7.** The effect of empathy on the positive stereotypes of North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Cognitive empathy	Positive stereotypes	.101	.034	.167	2.999 <sup>**</sup>
Emotional empathy		.048	.032	.084	1.499

$$R^2=.044 F(2, 397)=10.127^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

### 4.3.2. The effect of empathy on the emotion towards North Korean defectors

This research examined how the empathy of soldiers influences positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. The result, as seen in <Table 8>, showed that empathy has

a 7.9% significant explanatory power on the positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. In particular, both cognitive and emotional empathy had statistically significant effects on positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. This means that the more cognitive empathy and emotional empathy soldiers have, the stronger the positive emotion towards North Korean defectors is.

**Table 8.** The effect of empathy on the positive emotions towards North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Cognitive empathy	Positive emotions	.048	.019	.139	2.530*
Emotional empathy		.063	.018	.195	3.555***

$$R^2=.079 F(2, 397)=18.015^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

The effect of the empathy of soldiers on compassion towards North Korean defectors was examined. The result, as seen in <Table 9>, showed that empathy has a 4.9% significant explanatory power on compassion towards North Korean defectors. In particular, emotional empathy had a statistically significant effect on compassion towards North Korean defectors. However, cognitive empathy did not have statistically significant re-

sults. This means that the better the emotional empathy of soldiers, the higher the compassion towards North Korean defectors is. However, as a result of examining how the empathy of soldiers influences negative emotions towards North Korean defectors, both cognitive and emotional empathy did not have statistically significant effects on negative emotions towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 9.** The effect of empathy on compassion towards North Korean defectors(N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Cognitive empathy	Compassion	.013	.023	.033	.594
Emotional empathy		.082	.021	.214	3.852***

$$R^2=.049 F(2, 397)=11.313^{***}$$

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.



### 4.3.3. The effect of empathy on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors

This study examined how the empathy of soldiers influences a sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors. The result, as seen in <Table 10>, showed that empathy has a 4.0% significant explanatory power on

the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors. In particular, cognitive empathy had a statistically significant effect on compassion towards North Korean defectors. However, emotional empathy did not have statistically significant results. This means that the better the cognitive empathy of soldiers is, the higher the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors.

**Table 10.** The effect of empathy on the sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors (N=400).

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t
Cognitive empathy	Social distance	-.164	.048	-.193	-3.449***
Emotional empathy		-.026	.045	-.033	-.590
$R^2=.040 F(2, 397)=9.240^{***}$					

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the effect of the soldiers' psychological traits (authoritarianism, perfectionism, empathy) on the prejudices (stereotype, emotion, sense of social distance) towards North Korean defectors was explored. First, as a result of examining how authoritarianism influences the stereotypes of North Korean defectors, it showed that the higher the authoritarianism, the higher the negative stereotypes, negative emotions, and sense of social distance towards North Korean defectors. However, it was found out that authoritarianism does not have any relation with positive stereotypes and positive emotions towards North Korean defectors. Second, as a result of the influence perfectionism has on North Korean defectors, it showed that as self-oriented perfectionism increases, the positive stereotypes, positive emotions, and compassion towards North Korean defectors increase as well. As other-oriented perfectionism increases, the sense of social distance was found to decrease. Moreover, as socially prescribed perfectionism increases, negative stereotypes, negative emotions, and a sense of social distance

get higher. On the other hand, compassion towards North Korean defectors was shown to get lower. Third, as a result of examining how empathy influences the stereotypes of North Korean defectors, when cognitive empathy gets higher, positive stereotypes and positive emotions get higher as well and the sense of social distance gets lower. Therefore, it seems that basically empathy generates positive prejudice towards North Korean defectors. It was also found out that cognitive empathy influences positive stereotypes and a sense of social distance, while emotional empathy influences compassion differently.

As shown in the results of the study, efforts to reduce authoritarianism, increase self-oriented perfectionism, and improve empathic ability are needed. First, in order to reduce authoritarianism, understanding the social minority group which contrasts the authoritarian personality, and recognition change, which is to live a community life together with North Korean defectors, are needed. For this to happen, authoritarianism which is rampant in Korean society should be reduced through public advertisements and various social programs. In addition, a social atmosphere where people can sympa-

timize with North Korean defectors must be created, similar to conducting campaign on understanding the multicultural families. Moreover, aside from educating soldiers within the military, it should be applied to the students' curriculum system to induce the formation of character that is not authoritative towards social minority groups. Second, rather than educating soldiers on the overall concept and understanding of perfectionism, detailed education on lower dimensions of perfectionism and formation of self-oriented perfectionism should be done. Through this, self-oriented perfectionism which provides a positive view should be increased and socially prescribed perfectionism which forms a negative view must be reduced. Third, it is necessary to improve empathy to understand North Korean defectors and build affection and intimacy in having them as members of the society. The social bond of sympathy that can positively help in embracing social minority groups needs to be prepared through having appreciation education, public advertisement, and developing communication ability on North Korean defectors.

In preparation for a true social integration, and by extension, a reunification of two countries, the military has to exert efforts in understanding the prejudices and sense of distance that can happen when North Korean defectors and their second generation join the army. Moreover, measures to mitigate such situations are needed as well.

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### Lead Author

**Song Kyung-jae** / Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon  
Associate Professor

B.A. Kangwon National University

M.A. Korea University

Ph.D. Korea University

### Research field

- Concept Mapping Study about the Motives of Verbal Abuse in Military Life, *Korea Journal of Counseling*, 13(4) (2012).
- A Study on the Actual Condition and Development Plan of Psychological Warfare in North Korea, *International Journal of Military Affairs*, 2(2) (2017).

### Major career

- 2011~present. Dean of Department of Counseling Psychology & Chief of Center for Teaching and Learning.
- 2012~2014. Korea Military Counseling Association, Chief Academician.

### Corresponding Author

**Lee Sang-bong** / Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon  
Instructor

B.A. Kyungpook National University

M.A. Korea National Defense University

### Research field

- The Influence of Shared Leadership on Team Performance: Focusing on the Moderating Effect of Value Congruence, *Kyungpook National University, Master's Thesis* (2013).
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### Major career

- 2017~present. Department of Counseling Psychology, Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon, Instructor.
- 2018~present. International Society for Crisis & Safety, Member.