
Unending Toil :
**Child Labor within
North Korea**



PSCORE
People for Successful COrean REunification

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Child Labor within North Korea

북한 아동 강제노동 보고서

PSCORE

People for Successful COrean REunification

사) 성공적인 통일을 만들어가는 사람들

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Authors	Lim Hyo-Kyung (Jenny), Chang Heidi Hee-Kyung, Nam Bada
Interviewers	Nam Bada, Lim Hyo-Kyung (Jenny), Chang Heidi Hee-Kyung, Kim Young-II
Copy Editors	Soamiangaly Zafimboahanginirina Rakotobe, Brendan McCormick, Chris Buchman, Hana Bradshaw
Other Contributors	Shin Young-seo (Joyce), Koh Eunbyul (Abigail), Jack Halliwell, Lucille Savournin, Hyungwon Jang, Kim Soo-Hee, Shin Soo-Kyung, Ryu Ji-Sun, Lee Young-Hee
Editor in Chief	Nam Bada
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Korean Names mentioned in this report follow the format surname and then hyphenated given name.

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Part One

“ We usually studied in the morning and worked in the afternoon. We did everything they required us to do - farming, construction, digging dirt, gathering human feces (for fertilizing purposes). It was like this all year long.”

Kim Ki-Hoon

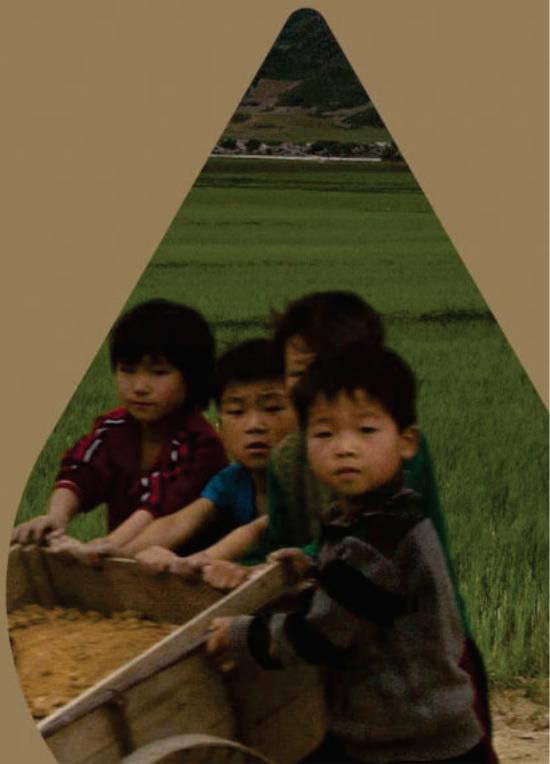
“I think physical labor takes up about 40% of education, and physical labor of students is explained to the public as a rightful activity.”

Kim Sae-Joon

“ We went to the Agricultural Labor Support in the afternoon after the morning classes. I remember being thirsty and the work being extremely strenuous. Even in third or fourth grade of elementary school, we worked for the whole day and returned late at night between 9 and 10 pm.”

Hwang Soo-Min

Introduction



1

Background

In writing *“Unending Toil: Child Labor within North Korea,”* People for Successful COrean REunification (PSCORE) addresses the prevalence of child labor in North Korea. Countless testimonies from North Korean defectors reveal that child labor is an institutionalized form of child exploitation in the DPRK.

International organizations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), have collected and analyzed extensive data regarding global standards of child labor.

Yet for North Korea, there are no official statistics released on this subject. However, North Korean defectors interviewed by PSCORE and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have provided testimonies that indisputably prove the existence of child labor practices in various forms.

In addition to the North Korean government withholding information from the international community, North Korean citizens fail to recognize these labor practices as child exploitation, and children continue to be placed in dangerous circumstances. The North Korean government does nothing to rectify this situation. It hypocritically acknowledges the global standard in denouncing child labor, “to protect the health, safety, and morals of children,” after ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990.¹ However, the authorities continue to force children to work in the education system, political prison camps, orphanages, and throughout society. Child labor is simply another method of indoctrination to maintain the Kim regime’s sovereignty and control.

PSCORE seeks to incriminate the North Korean regime for serious labor exploitation and repressive social structures with regards to child labor. All North

¹ United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, “*2015 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*,” (Washington: U.S. Ilab, 2016).

Korean defectors interviewed testified that they had experienced child labor, regardless of class status. We publish this report with the hope that future children of North Korea will enjoy guaranteed, basic human rights and a healthy childhood.

2

Methodology & Interviewees

The North Korean government's inner workings are extremely opaque. The DPRK maintains that child workers are given proper treatment without releasing any dependable data to validate its claims. In order to ascertain the truth, PSCORE conducted thorough interviews with North Korean defectors currently living in South Korea. These interviewees were specifically chosen because of their first-hand experiences, either because they had been subject to child labor or because they had authorized it. For their safety and anonymity,

their names and personal details have been edited. To provide additional context for the defectors' testimonies, PSCORE used official documents, mainly those released by the North Korean government, South Korean government, NGOs focused on child labor, and the United Nations (UN). News articles and publications were used as supplementary resources. The compiled information was then sorted and organized accordingly in this report.

In order to prepare this report, many defectors were interviewed, and 37 testimonies were used. Defectors names have been changed for their safety. However, in order to find out at what time and in what area the events occurred, the following information is provided about the testimonies. The time when they escaped was not important in this study, and interviewees were hesitant to disclose it because exposure of personal information could potentially put family members in danger.

Table 1 – Personal Information of the Defectors included in this Report

Name	Year Born	Home Province
Ahn Ji-Young	Mid 1990's	North Hwanghae
Ahn Sang-Min	Late 1980's	Ryanggang
Choi Eun-Young	Mid 1990's	Ryanggang
Choi Ju-Yeon	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Han Chul-Min	Mid 1960's	Spent his childhood in Camp 18 (<i>kwan-li-so</i>)
Heo Sang-Yoon	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Hong Hye-Jin	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Hwang Soo-Min	Early 1990's	South Hwanghae
Jo Dong-Ik	Mid 1980's	North Hamgyong
Jung Yoon-Bo	Late 1980's	North Hamgyong
Kim Eun-Hee	Early 1970's	Ryanggang
Kim Hak-Chul	Mid 1980's	Ryanggang

Name	Year Born	Home Province
Kim Ha-Sun	Mid 1960's	North Pyongan
Kim Hye-Sook	Early 1960's	Pyongyang
Kim Jin-Joo	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Kim Ji-Yeon	Early 1980's	Ryanggang
Kim Jong-Hwa	Mid 1990's	North Hamgyong
Kim Ki-Hoon	Mid 1980's	South Hamgyong
Kim Sae-Joon	Early 1990's	Ryanggang
Kim Sang-Ho	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Kim Yeon-Ri	Early 1990's	Pyongyang
Koo Dong-Su	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Lee Eun-Jo	Early 1990's	North Hamgyong
Lee Ga-Yeon	Mid 1990's	North Hamgyong
Lee Ji-Eun	Mid 1990's	Ryanggang
Lee Sun-Ri	Late 1980's	South Hwanghae
Moon Yoon-Ji	Early 1970's	Ryanggang

Name	Year Born	Home Province
Park Chang-Shik	Mid 1980's	Pyongyang
Park Dae-Hun	Early 1990's	Ryanggang
Park Ji-Uk	Early 1990's	Ryanggang
Park Jong-Gu	Early 1980's	South Pyongan
Park Jong-Woo	Mid 1990's	North Hamgyong
Park Kyung-Ho	Late 1980's	North Hamgyong
Park Min-Young	Early 1990's	Ryanggang
Yang Soon-Yi	Mid 1990's	Ryanggang
Yoon Kang-sook	Mid 1990's	North Hamgyong
Yoon Sul-Mi	Mid 1980's	North Hamgyong

The interviewees consisted of people from various disciplines who testified to the various types of child labor in North Korea. Such disciplines include students, school teachers, political prison camp survivors, orphans, juvenile delinquents, and experienced children in security detention centers or correctional centers.

Two or more testimonies are identified in the report per sector to identify child labor in various settings. Individual experiences may differ, and if defectors experienced child labor in that specific sector, the testimonies of these individuals were also included.

3

Definitions & Terminology

3.1 Definition of “Child”

Article 1 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which North Korea ratified in 1990, defines a “child” as “a person below the age of eighteen years unless the law of a particular country sets the legal age earlier.”²

² United Nations, United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, “*Convention on the Rights of a Child*,” 1989, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>.

Article 2 of the 2010 North Korean Children’s Rights Protection Act defines a child as a person aged sixteen years or younger.

3.2 Definitions and Regulations of “Child Labor”

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has ratified 5 United Nations human rights treaties, as well as an additional CRC protocol that address children’s rights.³ Two of the most fundamental agreements for children’s rights are the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which North Korea ratified in 1981, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Regarding child labor, Article 10 of the ICESCR stresses the protection of children from economic and social exploitation, including the establishment of the legal age for paid employment and the punishment of employment of children in work that is detrimental to

³ United Nations, United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, *“Ratification Status for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,”*
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=47&Lang=EN.

their normal development.⁴

Similarly, Article 32 of the CRC stipulates each state party must take special measures, such as providing regulations of work hours and conditions, to safeguard children from work that interferes with their education and development as a whole.

In addition to the ICESCR and the CRC, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has dealt with labor problems, in particular, eliminating child labor and establishing international labor standards, since its formation in 1919. As a UN agency and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, the ILO has 187 member states, but North Korea is one of the few UN member states that is not a member of the ILO. Although North Korea does not belong to the ILO, the discussion of the ILO and its achievements is necessary because it still provides insights that reflect modern labor standards valued and adhered to by most states.

3.2.1 ILO Definition

The ILO's definition of child labor is consistent with that of the ICESCR and the CRC regarding the

⁴ United Nations, United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, *"International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),"* (1966).

danger to children’s development, but it also specifies parameters regarding interference with schooling. A case is considered child labor if it violates any one of the following three criteria:⁵ (1) depriving the opportunity to attend school, (2) requiring him or her to leave school prematurely, or (3) combining school attendance with mandatory, excessively long, and heavy work.

Furthermore, the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention contains the most comprehensive international definition of minimum age for admission to employment. According to the convention, the minimum age for employment depends on the type of work and the socioeconomic status of a particular country.

Specifically, Article 2 explains that the basic minimum age for employment cannot be under 15, with an exception for countries whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, in which case, they can set the minimum age as low as 14.⁶ Article 7 also provides that, “national laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age on light work which is (a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development, and (b) not such

⁵ “What is Child Labour?” *International Labour Organization*, <http://ilo.org/jpec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁶ International Labour Organization, “*IC138 – Minimum Age Convention, 1973: Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment*,” (1973).

as to prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation or training programs approved by the competent authority, or their capacity to benefit from the instruction received.”⁷ However, Article 3 clearly states that one shall not be less than 18 years, or 16, under strict conditions, for any type of employment which by “its nature or the circumstances... is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons.”⁸ It is important to note that there is no exception to this rule, regardless of the level of economic development of a particular country. Thus, North Korea’s lack of membership in the ILO only highlights its disregard for basic human rights and child protection.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

3.2.2 North Korean Domestic Laws

Turning to North Korean domestic laws, an initial glance at its constitution and other enactments will portray North Korea as a country that does not tolerate child labor and exploitation.⁹ For example, according to Article 31 of the North Korean Constitution of 2016, North Korean citizens are eligible for labor beginning at the age of 16, and child labor is forbidden. In addition, in the Children's Rights Protection Act of 2010, Article 19 strictly forbids child labor, including an act of requiring children to work by any institution, enterprise, organization, and individual citizen. Article 26 stresses respect for a child's individuality, stating that school-affiliated personnel must be exemplary models for children and must never in any case insult, discriminate, or perform an intolerable act, such as cursing, interrogation, contempt, and physical punishment, toward a child. Moreover, Article 31 promises that a child without parents or guardians will be raised at an orphanage or an academy at the expense of the government. However, because this existing legislation is not enforced, abuse of children's rights is systemic.

⁹ In our research, we compared multiple articles concerning the legal age to work and the rights to free education and medical care from the North Korean Constitution as it has been adopted and amended beginning in 1948 and continuing through the years 1972, 1992, 1998, 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2016. You can find this comparison in Appendix C.

Despite being a party to several international conventions on child labor and having enacted domestic laws against child labor, the North Korean government does not, in reality, offer meaningful protection for children.

Part Two

“‘Everyone who eats must work’ - this is the principle for ‘general mobilization’. During the period of the general mobilization, each school is matched with a farm, and those who go to that school work at that specific farm.”

Lee Eun-Jo

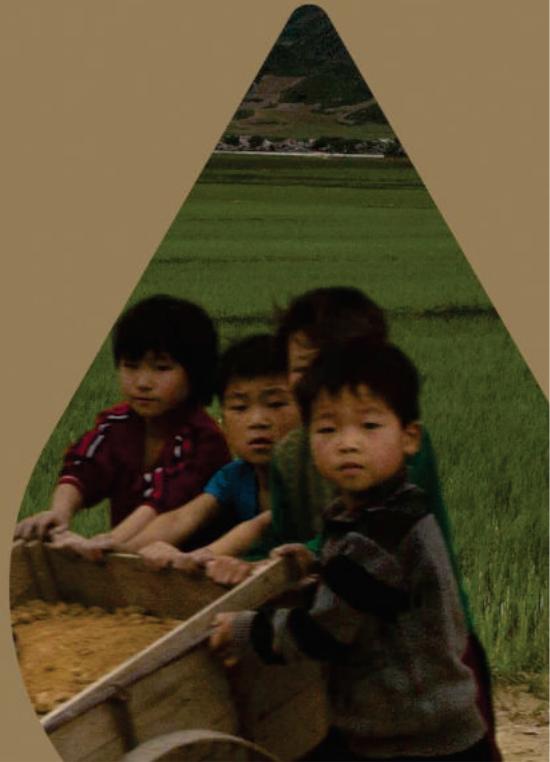
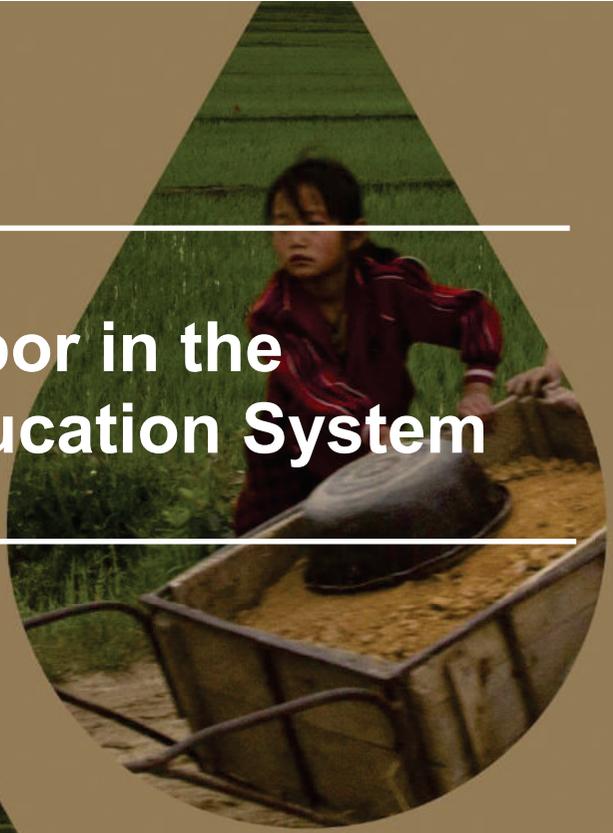
“From the second grade of elementary school, we had the Agricultural Labor Support for an entire day without classes during the designated period of Agricultural Labor Support.”

Park Dae-Hoon

“It was really boring, hard, and distressing. Learning the revolutionary ideology every day, completing the Children’s Initiative, and walking around the city singing - all these things were arduous.”

Hwang Soo-Min

Child Labor in the Education System



4

Overview of Child Labor in the Education System

North Korea has laws that disguise its education system as modern and centered around a core principle of “children’s rights,” such as the North Korean Children’s Rights Protection Act (2010). The first five articles of this act emphasize the government’s role in guaranteeing and promoting children’s rights, happiness, and benefits. Article 4 states, “A consistent policy of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is to affix great importance to children and to prioritize guaranteeing

their rights and gains. The nation takes a deep interest in the growth and development of children and gives various considerations so that all children can exercise their rights to their heart's content and grow with the greatest happiness in life."¹⁰

The laws on education go even further. In addition to Article 47 of the Socialist Constitution of the DPRK which promises free education, Article 13 of the General Education Act (2011) prohibits educational institutions from collecting fees from students and their parents or guardians for entrance into school, lecture, learning practices, field trips, and educational explorations.¹¹ There are also provisions to ensure the sound operation of schools. Article 23 guarantees the coverage of the operating expenses of educational institutions by the national or organizational budget. Article 26 requires pertinent institutions to construct school buildings, laboratories, and school libraries, and to repair them, and Article 16 similarly orders pertinent institutions, enterprises, and organizations to systematically produce, supply, and send equipment, tools, and materials necessary for education, as well as other laboratory equipment and teaching tools, to

¹⁰ Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, *"2010 Children's Rights Protection Act Order 1307,"* 2010.

¹¹ Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, *"Education Act of 2011,"* 2011.

applicable educational institutions.

On paper it would seem that the North Korean government wishes to provide high-quality education and opportunities for success to its children. However, this starkly contrasts with reality. Children are viewed not as the “future of [their] homeland,” as stated in Article 2 of the Children’s Rights Protection Act, but as an appropriate source of arduous labor. The education system has become a channel through which children are mobilized for farm labor; a cover to gather children to collect miscellaneous, yet valuable, items; and a cheap labor force for construction work and other various undertakings unsuitable for minors. The systematic non-implementation of child rights laws has its deepest roots in the education system of North Korea.

5

Agricultural Labor Support

“The students work a lot in reality. They labor on the field until they get darker than the monkeys.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“We walked for an hour or two to get to the field.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“Agricultural Labor Support” refers to mandatory farm labor. The government mobilizes children through the education system and sends them to a local farm, which is partnered with a school. Because farm work is considered an essential component of the school curriculum, the work is unpaid. Students participate in both the Local and Long-term Agricultural Labor Support. The Local Agricultural Labor Support occurs after school at a nearby farm, whereas the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support requires students to work on a farm collective for a month or more. The specific types as well as the intensity of agricultural labor students engage in depends on the farming season and students’ grade level.

The government plays a central role in the organization of the Agricultural Labor Support. Because the North Korean economy is nearly an autarky, without significant trade with foreign countries, it must produce its own necessities. Its agrarian-centered economy requires a constant supply of farm labor. One defector shared:

“Due to North Korea’s emphasis on agriculture as the center of politics (and economy), every person who eats must contribute by laboring at a farm. It’s considered only fair and natural. Some people suspected that school principals

chose certain farms to partner with in order to make profits for themselves.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

Even children are expected to contribute to the economy, and this unreasonable expectation is manifested by the incorporation of labor into the school curriculum.

“The government assigns each school to work at a certain place.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“‘Everyone who eats must work’ - this is the principle for the ‘general mobilization’. During the period of the general mobilization, each school is matched with a farm, and those who go to that school work at that specific farm.

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

In addition to the government-run Agricultural Labor Support, children are assembled for agricultural labor organized by the school itself. School principals collude with local farm collectives and independently contract out their students in exchange for produce. This contracting secures funds and maintains the operation

of schools.

“The school organizes the Agricultural Labor Support, and everyone has to go.”

- **Park Ji-Uk**

“The school operated with a portion of harvest given by the local collective farm after the students worked on the farm.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“Because the school had no money, they had to have students work at local businesses in order to receive various materials from them and maintain the school.”

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

The North Korean government justifies the Agricultural Labor Support, an indisputable case of child labor, by emphasizing the importance of raising work ethic in children. Article 32 of the 1999 North Korean Childcare and Education Act reads, “State institutions as well as other child care and education institutions should encourage children to enjoy work and to become accustomed to labor from a young age.” By disguising the Agricultural Labor Support as a necessary channel

through which work ethic is cultivated in children, the North Korean government ignores its responsibility to protect children's rights.

“One time in second year of high school, I was out at the Agricultural Labor Support when it rained a lot. They gave out a snack, usually noodles made out of corn, around 4 in the afternoon, and I got indigestion that day because I ate noodles while being rained on.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“My cousin came back from an Agricultural Labor Support session, and he had bug bites and scars from leeches.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

Another reason for the mobilization of children for farm work is the government's promise of food provision to teachers. Article 17 of the 2011 North Korean General Education Act guarantees the supply of food and other necessities to teachers and students. A former teacher from North Korea explained that in order to carry out this law, the government approves the school mobilization of children for farm labor to produce food supplies for teachers. The government fulfills its

commitment to teachers by exploiting the labor of its children. Though the law states children are to be protected from onerous labor, the North Korean government sees students as useful tools for labor and exploitation.

“The teachers are allowed to make their students be part of this general mobilization. Teachers should receive 700 grams of rice and a certain amount of vegetables; to fulfill this, they force their students to labor and produce enough to meet this requirement. The government decides upon the mandates, but doesn’t do the work required. The children are the ones left to execute the government’s duty. The teachers think students are being justly required to work because they are receiving education for free. In the same way, the children believe that this kind of labor is an indispensable part of being in their community.

There is a labor party in the city and a civil complaint registry for children, and they sometimes receive reports of children being unreasonably overworked and exhausted due to extreme exploitation. When students make complaints, an investigation takes place.

There are no consequences if the amount of labor the children are subjected to is close to the norm. However, it becomes problematic if the teachers go too much out of their way to make personal profits using these children.”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

5.1 Local Agricultural Labor Support

The Local Agricultural Labor Support involves student labor on farms close to the students' schools and homes. Over the course of the year, students are given different tasks depending on the season. As students get older, they are assigned increasingly onerous labor. The work is strenuous, exhausting, and time-consuming. Students invariably spend more time performing unpaid labor on farms than they do actually studying and receiving a proper education.

“The hardest task was planting rice. People had to do everything without the help of machines. I lived in an agricultural region, so there were a lot of tiny fields. We planted rice from the age of 14. When we were younger, we ran errands. We didn't even take a break from working

when it rained. We were expected to work during the rice planting season no matter what. We had to get a signed form that verified our participation in the Agricultural Labor Support. The school constantly pressured teachers to get these forms from the students, so the teachers in turn always urged us to turn them in.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

5.1.1 Schedule of Labor

The Local Agricultural Labor Support usually begins after school between 12 to 2 in the afternoon. At most schools, class ends at 1 pm. Students go home for lunch for an hour and come back to school by 2 to 2:30 pm at the latest for various labor activities, such as construction, practice for political events/campaigns, the Agricultural Labor Support, etc.

“A school typically ends at 1 o’clock. The children are told to come back to school by 2:30 after having lunch so that they could work. Their tasks include building infrastructures necessary for society. Such structures include laying gravel on railways or making swimming pools, or

farm work, such as weeding. It can be assumed that child labor goes on from 2 to 6 pm every day.”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

At schools with nearby farms, there is after-school Local Agricultural Labor Support, and the schools decide how frequently its students work. Some require their students to work for several days during the week, while other schools demand daily Local Agricultural Labor Support. Schools have even required students to do the Agricultural Labor Support on the weekends after the *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* in the morning.¹² Even if students are relatively far from any farms, the schools find other forms of labor for them to conduct.

“There were no farms nearby, so my school had comparatively less Agricultural Labor Support (approximately 10 days in a year). However, we had some internal projects for the school. For example, we built rabbit hutches and planted trees.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

¹² See section 5.2.2 for more information on the *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*.

Once students arrive at their school's partner farm, they engage in arduous field activities until late at night. It is common for children to work until anytime between 6 and 9 pm, after which they return to their homes. Students are forced to do any labor the farms, schools, and government deem necessary, and their health and wellbeing are considered secondary compared to the goals of North Korea's government.

"We went to the Agricultural Labor Support in the afternoon after the morning classes. I remember being thirsty and the work being extremely strenuous. Even in third or fourth grade of elementary school, we worked for the whole day and returned late at night between 9 and 10 pm."

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

"Because I lived in a rural village, we did the Agricultural Labor Support when school ended at 2 until 8 pm every day (frequently on the weekends too). I really couldn't study in this environment... My dad even shouted, 'What's the point of studying?'"

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“I lived in a rural village, so we went to the Agricultural Labor Support every day after school ended around 3 pm. Except in the winter, we went almost every day. In the summer, the school even made the kindergarten children work. I did the Agricultural Labor Support from elementary to high school.”

- **Kim Jong-Hwa**

“We had classes in the morning and went to work in nearby farms in the afternoon. The school was close to the farm. We did work, such as weeding, planting rice, harvesting, and planting corn nutrition jars.¹³ When we had school, we worked in farms almost every day. The only days we did not have the Agricultural Labor Support were when we had other things to do. There were a lot of things we had to collectively give to the government, so we were busy collecting those things. In addition, we were asked to gather and work in the farms for one or two days.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

¹³ “Nutrition Jars”: Though described as such by defectors, nutrition jars are not actually jars, but clumps of nutrient rich dirt filled with crop seeds.

“The Agricultural Labor Support that took place after school required that the students work every day from 2 until 7 or 8 pm in the evening. The farm was decided by either the Youth League or the principal. When the principal chose the farm, it seemed like he embezzled the profits for his own use.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

However, students in urban areas often do not perform local Agricultural Labor Support. Instead, they have to give monetary aid to schools and farm collectives in place of work. Rural students, whose families are often poorer, do not have this option and are forced to work in the Local Agricultural Labor Support.

5.1.2 Farming Season

With North Korea being a primarily agrarian society, there is a constant demand for labor throughout the year. As children are mobilized to compensate for the scarcity of manpower, they engage in different types of farm activities each season. Generally, the spring season requires sowing crops like corn, planting trees, and making “nutrition jars.” In summer, they plant rice and weed; in fall, harvest, thresh crops, carry sheaves of rice, glean crops; and in winter, gather compost and firewood.

“We did a lot of farming. In the morning, we had classes, and in the afternoon, we worked. From high school onwards, we had to transplant rice seedlings from 3 seedbeds every day for a month during the rice planting season. During the weeding season, we went to corn fields. In the spring, we went around to dig up different plants and herbs (shepherd’s purse, wild rocambole, etc.). In the fall, we went to catch grasshoppers, carry sheaves of rice, and glean leftover crops. In the winter, we picked up dog dung and gathered firewood. In busy farming seasons, we worked every day. Out of 90% of the total number of school days, we went to work after school. For the rest of the time (10%), we participated in extracurricular activities after school, and I was on the basketball team. Only those who were really intelligent were excluded from work.”¹⁴

- **Lee Sun-Ri**

¹⁴ Despite this defector’s personal experiences, in reality, intelligent people are not always excluded from work.

“In the blazing sun, we removed weeds and planted rice on all fours. Without boots, I rolled up my pants to the knees, and leeches stuck onto my legs. There was different work depending on the season. In March, we planted corn, and in the fall, we harvested corn and rice. I normally carried a big water bucket on my head.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“The ‘Movement for Good Work’ included the following: In spring, we would go to the farm to plant seeds and trees. In summer, we do a lot of weeding and build dams. In fall, we harvest and make compost, and in winter, we collect manure and pull out corn roots at farms. Activities such as the ‘Agricultural Labor Support’ and ‘School Management’ are also included in the ‘Movement for Good Work.’”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“It seemed like we had more intense work to do because our school was located in an agricultural region.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

The process of rice-planting and making “nutrition jars” demonstrates how debilitating these farm activities are for North Korean children. There are two main methods for planting rice: direct seeding and transplanting. Direct seeding involves “broadcasting dry seed or pre-germinated seeds and seedlings” while transplanting requires “pre-germinated seedlings [to be] transferred from a seedbed to the wet field.”¹⁵ In North Korea, transplanting is the standard rice-planting technique although it requires more labor.

After seedlings have been raised on seedbeds, they are transferred to the field by hand, because machinery is scarce in North Korea. The purpose of “nutrition jars” is similar to rice transplanting. Instead of sowing seeds of corn or other crops directly onto the field, they are first planted in a jar filled with nutritious soil.¹⁶

¹⁵ “How is Rice Grown,” *Ricepedia: The Online Authority on Rice*, <http://ricepedia.org/rice-as-a-crop/how-is-rice-grown>.

¹⁶ “*Nutrition Jar*,” Naver Korean Dictionary, http://krdic.naver.com/small_detail.nhn?docid=27344200.

Once they have germinated, the seeds, together with the lump of soil, are then transplanted into the field. This work is monotonous, exhausting, and dangerous. While performing this work daily for hours at a time, children are exposed to harsh and high temperatures during the busy farming season, which is a clear violation of both international law and North Korea's own domestic regulations.

Tables 2.1-2.4 – Calendar representation of a typical month’s work for the school and the Local Agricultural Labor Support ¹⁷

¹⁷ It is based on information gathered during a series of interviews with defector Yoon Kang-Sook, who provided PSCORE with details of the seasonal schedule of agricultural labor performed by students.

Spring: Agricultural Regions

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
		1	2
		Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans
6	7	8	9
Sowing Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans
13	14	15	16
Sowing Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
20	21	22	23
Sowing Collecting Brackens	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting Brackens	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting wild chives	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting wild chives
27	28	29	30
Sowing Collecting Brackens	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting Brackens	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting Brackens	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting Brackens

Fri	Sat	Sun
3	4	5
Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Break
10	11	12
Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting sunflower seeds, hemp, Castor beans, and beans	Break
17	18	19
Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Break
24	25	26
Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting wild chives	Planting corn nutrition jars Collecting wild chives	Break
<p>※ During the one-month period of 'the battle of planting', students are expected to pack up and leave their home to participate in planting, without even going to classes.</p> <p>※ They participate in collective exercises for ten days for February 16th (Kim Jong-Il's birthday) and for April 15th (Kim Il-Sung's birthday). They walk for an hour everyday to commute.</p>		

Summer: Agricultural Regions

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
		1	2
		Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting pecans, hazelnuts, and acorns	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting pecans, hazelnuts, and acorns
6	7	8	9
Making bricks out of soil	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting pecans, hazelnuts, and acorns	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting pecans, hazelnuts, and acorns	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting pecans, hazelnuts, and acorns
13	14	15	16
Pulling out grass and laying rocks to build railways Collecting water parsley Looking for rabbit hide	Pulling out grass and laying rocks to build railways Collecting water parsley Looking for rabbit hide	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting water parsley Looking for rabbit hide	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting water parsley Looking for rabbit hide
20	21	22	23
Making bricks out of soil Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
27	28	29	30
Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Drying water parsleys	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Drying water parsleys	Pulling out grass and laying rocks to build railways Drying water parsleys	Pulling out grass and laying rocks to build railways Drying water parsleys

Fri	Sat	Sun
3	4	5
General Clean-up, Friday check-up	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Weeding Collecting bush clovers	Break
10	11	12
General Clean-up, Friday check-up	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Weeding Collecting bush clovers	Break
17	18	19
General Clean-up, Friday check-up	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Collecting bush clovers	Break
24	25	26
General Clean-up, Friday check-up	Working for the Agricultural Labor Support Weeding Taking off the skin of bush clovers	Break

※ They participate in collective exercises for ten days for June 6th (The founding day of Josun Central Party). They walk for an hour everyday to commute.

Autumn: Agricultural Regions

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
		1	2
		Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support
6	7	8	9
Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support
13	14	15	16
The Battle of Autumn Harvesting			
20	21	22	23
Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron			
27	28	29	30
Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support

Fri	Sat	Sun
3	4	5
Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Break
10	11	12
Agricultural Labor Support	Agricultural Labor Support	Break
17	18	19
The Battle of Autumn Harvesting	The Battle of Autumn Harvesting	Break
24	25	26
Harvest Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Harvest Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Break

※ During the one-week period of the Battle of Autumn Harvesting, the students are expected to dedicate their time to working, without even attending classes.

Winter: Agricultural Regions

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
		1	2
		Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
6	7	8	9
Collecting coals in mines	Collecting coals in mines	Collecting coals in mines	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
		Collecting excrements	Collecting excrements
13	14	15	16
Transporting soils in burlap bags from nearby electric power stations	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
20	21	22	23
Collecting coals in mines	Collecting coals in mines	Collecting coals in mines	Collecting scrap paper and scrap iron
27	28	29	30
Transporting soils in burlap bags from nearby electric power stations	Looking for rabbit hides	Looking for rabbit hides	Looking for rabbit hides
		Collecting excrements	Collecting excrements

Fri	Sat	Sun
3	4	5
Working on trees (Cutting, gathering, and moving firewood).	Working on trees	Break
10	11	12
Working on trees	Working on trees	Break
17	18	19
Working on trees	Working on trees	Break
24	25	26
Working on trees	Working on trees	Break
<p>※ Working on trees is a very exhausting task, so the students have to take at least one day of break after working for two days. Some students cut, gather, and move firewood. Some only perform the last two tasks.</p> <p>※ The students practiced singing for ten days in the 'Meeting for Patriotic Singing' for Kim Jeong-Sook's birthday on December 24th</p>		

5.1.3 Grade Level and Age of Student Laborers

North Korean Primary and Secondary Education is divided into Elementary and Middle-High School, (A combination of Middle School and High School, from here on referred to separately for the sake of clarity). As seen in Table 2 below, almost all of the students should be considered child laborers according to North Korean constitutional standards, while under the UN CRC all children under the age of 18 fall in this category

Table 3 - Division of Age and School Level

School	Age
Elementary School	6 to 11 years old
Middle School	12 to 14 years old
High School	15 to 17 years old

Upperclassmen are usually assigned to more demanding tasks than lowerclassmen. Labor, such as weeding and watering, is considered less challenging and thus done by most students regardless of grade level. But tasks like harvesting and transplanting seedlings, which are more taxing and involve tools, are allotted to older students.

“The intensity of labor depended on the grade level. In the spring season, high school first years pulled rice seedlings out of rice seedbeds and carried them. The second and third years engaged in more intense labor, such as transplanting rice seedlings, spreading manure over the field, etc. During the fall season, first years loaded up tractors with sheaves of rice and piled them up, cleaned up at the threshing center, and harvested corn. Second and third years reaped rice with a sickle, harvested corn, carried rice sheaves and poured them into a threshing machine, which was an even more difficult task.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

“In our 1st year of middle school, we pulled out the rice seedlings out of seedbeds, tied them into a bundle, and carried them to the rice paddies, where the upperclassmen would plant them. Starting our 1st year of high school, we planted them.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“I first started the Agricultural Labor Support in my 2nd grade of elementary school, at the age of 9. I was assigned to planting corn. I carried a large basket and a large bottle of water and was in charge of pouring water on corn plants when they were being planted.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

Despite variations in labor activities, the commonality between all tasks is that children start strenuous labor at an age too young. Children toiling on a field for as many as seven hours a day is unjustifiable. In order to satisfy the needs of school personnel, children are mobilized for arduous labor, and the North Korean government offers no protection against this grave breach of child labor provisions. In fact, it actively participates in the practice by pairing schools with farms and incorporating the Agricultural Labor Support as an integral component of the school curriculum.

5.2 Long-term Agricultural Labor Support

“I started participating in the Agricultural Labor Support when I was in my third year of middle school. I stayed in a tiny house in an agricultural region and the house was made of wet sand, and I could see the sky at night. Water seeped through the rooftop when it rained. I was told to plant rice, but I had never done it before. When we planted rice, we had to haul the seedbed from the rice paddy, but it was too heavy to move. It rained a lot, and there were mosquitoes and leeches everywhere that attacked our bare feet. Everyone was very exhausted. I hated this period the most. I cried and told my mom on the phone that I wanted to go back home, but I couldn’t help but to stay and work because I didn’t have money.

There were also soldiers who worked with us as well. They made us work harder. They could start their work only after we finished our tasks, so they made us hurry. When boys got angry and acted impolitely to the soldiers, they were beat up.”

- **Koo Dong-Su**

The Long-term Agricultural Labor Support is generally for high school students. They perform similar work as they do for the Local Agricultural Labor Support, such as sowing, weeding, rice-planting, transplanting “nutrition jars”, and harvesting. The key difference between the two forms of the Agricultural Labor Support is the duration of work. During spring, summer, and fall there is a high demand for labor to complete farm work, so students are mobilized to assist and remain at a farm for a prolonged period of time. The duration of stay depends on the school, lasting usually from 30 to 40 days in the middle of the semester. Students travel to a local or distant farm, determined either by the government or the school, and lodge there while completing the farm-related tasks given to them.

5.2.1 Schedule of Labor

In contrast to the Local Agricultural Labor Support, the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support sees the forced participation of *all* students, whether from rural districts or urban areas. As it is mandatory to spend approximately a month at the farm, students pass the entire day working, from early in the morning to late at night.

“We had the Agricultural Labor Support starting our second year of high school for a whole month once a year, and we had to bring our own food to eat.”

- **Lee Ji-Eun**

“There was Agricultural Labor Support for 40 days in the summer.”

- **Moon Yoon-Ji**

“We did things like weeding but nothing harvest-related because they were afraid we were going to steal their crops. Students living in the city came to the rural village separately and usually stayed for a month.”

- **Kim Jong-Hwa**

“Beginning in high school, we had a spring and fall Agricultural Labor Support. We stayed at a farm for a month to work from morning until night.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

The Long-term Agricultural Labor Support can occur during different farming seasons, and some students are forced to go twice a year.

“In high school, I went to the Agricultural Labor Support in the Spring, from the end of April to mid-May. In the summer for 20 days of weeding, and in the fall for a month and a half until we finished all work for the season.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

“From our second year of elementary school, we had the Agricultural Labor Support for an entire day without classes during the designated period of Agricultural Labor Support. In the summer, we worked for 15 days during the rice planting season and for another 15 days during the weeding season. And from summer to fall, we routinely worked once or twice a week.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

“The first time I participated in the Agricultural Labor Support was my first year in elementary school. We had to stamp on the rice paddies and dry fields until they were flat and smooth. Starting in high school, we went to the month-long Agricultural Labor Support during the rice-planting season. We had to continue working even when it rained. At ordinary times, we did work like weeding and

autumn harvesting every day after school.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“The government designated the region for the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support projects. In these cases, the students worked from 7 am until 7 or 8 pm. When planting rice, the sunlight would be too strong that we only worked from 5 in the morning until 11 am, and we did different work in the afternoon.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

5.2.2 Types of Farm Labor

The labor of the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support is largely similar to the Short-term Agricultural Labor Support. However, as they work all day long, the intensity of labor is much stronger and they have difficulties with additional work to do early in the morning and late into the night.

“I woke at 5 AM and had to go to the rice field for rice planting. The rice field was covered in thin ice so I did not want to put my feet into the cold water. I put my hand in the

water, but it was so cold that my hands shrank at the mere touch. It is too cold until about 10 AM and after 2 pm, leeches latch onto my legs. I told my mom that this work was so hard, and she told me not to go to labor and will pay the bribe, somehow.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

“I worked on the farm for a month in spring and autumn. I worked all day while I staying in a house with four other students. Work intensity varies according to age. In spring, high school first years picked up the seedlings at the seedbed and carried them out. The second and third years were tasked with more arduous duties, such as seeding and fertilizing. In the fall, the high school first years carried rice sheaves to the tractor or stacked them up. We also arranged the corn in the threshing floor and harvested them. At times during our second and third years, we had to do a lot of hard work to harvest rice with a sickle, cut cornstalks, and thresh vegetation.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

“I went out to the Agricultural Labor Support for a month in summer. I planted cabbage in the Spring, and harvested in

Autumn. I had to travel for two or three hours every day to reach the farm and attendance was mandatory.”

- **Kim Jin-Joo**

“I went to the rice farming for a month. I had to work during that period so I even worked in the rain.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

While the students are in the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support, they need to live at the farm. The accommodation could be a farm building, a house of a work unit leader at the farm, or the private house of a farmer. The work unit leader places students, taking into consideration the size of the house, and arranges several people to stay in one house if it is big enough. Accommodation and sanitation facilities are very poor, no matter where they are. They leave home and are forced to work in a rural environment by the government. The students not only suffer because of the unpaid work, but are also vulnerable to harsh working conditions.

“Rural houses were generally shabby. I went out to Agricultural Labor Support in May every year, but it is still cold at this time. But the house was not heated. North Korean houses are all small. Structurally, it was built that you could see everyone when you had to wash. This forced us to

take quick showers when no one else was in the house. It was uncomfortable that everyone had to wash at the same time. Our blankets exuded noxious odors. At times, I wanted to chat with my friends, but I did not want to disturb the house's owner."

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

"Our accommodation was a farm propaganda room. It is a gathering place to meet after work on the farm. We slept at the unit leader's home or the private house of a farmer when we needed more accommodations. Even though they designated us to the farmer's house that has better condition between the two spaces, it was difficult, as the city children are relatively well-off. There are limited amount of meals; even if they brought additional meals, but it was still not enough.

Of course there is no place to wash in the work house. Students had to wash in the ditch in front of the house. I took some water to wash in a different area. I could not change my clothes after work. When urban children went to work in the rural Agricultural Labor Support, they

contracted lice a lot.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

5.2.3 Transportation and Food for Student Laborers

It is bad enough that children are forced to work in such a harsh environment. In North Korea, however, students are not only forced to work, but are thoroughly exploited from beginning to end. The additional burdens that students have to pay for long-term Agricultural Labor Support are as follows:

First, students must pay for the transportation required for traveling between the school and the farm. Although the schools make the decision to rent buses, the students assume the financial burden. They must pay a certain amount of money to the school for not only the rental but also gasoline.

Second, the students are responsible for their own meals at the farm. Everyone in the class is assigned to bring a specific amount of rice, snacks, cooking oil, etc., and once on the farm, a portion of the class prepares food throughout the day.

Third, although some defectors testified that there were times that the government or the farm provided some food, it was either minimal and of poor quality or taken away by the teachers. Teachers confiscate these

supplies for their private use.

“I went out to work when I was in high school and went to the same place every year. The teachers usually didn’t come with us. We were designated to a specific area to work in; once we arrived here, our homeroom teacher told us which region to go to. He said, ‘The Agricultural Labor Support lasts from the middle of August until sometime in September. You have to bring clothes, snacks, rice, oil, seasonings, and other ingredients for meals. We will gather together at school and travel by bus.’

All the students brought a certain amount of rice, and traveled together on a bus. The school collected money from the students to pay for gas. The students in a class with a lot of rich kids got a ride to the farm in a good car that the parents provided them with. We worked for one month.

In my second year of high school, my class dug out potatoes on a potato field an entire month, but I was in charge of preparing the meals. We prepared for meals only with the ingredients that the

students had brought. The government did not provide us with anything, but the farm provided us with some potatoes and vegetables, but they comprised only 20% of the entire meal.”

- Yang Soon-Yi

“I participated in the Agricultural Labor Support from my second year of middle school. There was the ‘Seeing Battle’ for 40 days in Spring and one month of ‘Autumn Harvesting Battle’ in autumn. Children brought all of the food they had collected leading up to this period to the farm, and the teachers kept to themselves the food provisions from the government. The parents knew about this, but they didn’t care because the food provided by the government was of poor quality anyway. They wanted to give their children good food, so they just pretended like they didn’t know anything. The teachers kept to themselves all of the food of poor quality and divided them among those in the higher hierarchy at school.”

- Yoon Sul-Mi

“In high school, we had the Long-term Agricultural Labor Support for 40-50 days, and I took some rice with me. But it wasn’t enough to last me long, so I was forced to only eat potatoes I dug up. It was a very strenuous and exhausting period.”

- **Kim Sae-Joon**

“Starting my 1st year of high school, we went to the Agricultural Labor Support every fall. For 40 days straight, we dug up potatoes for the entire day... Also for 40 days, we only ate potatoes for three meals a day; they fed us steamed potatoes mixed with a little bit of rice, shredded potatoes, kimchi, and cabbage soup. Because I was so hungry, I alleviated my hunger with little snacks I brought from home. But the teachers ate well with additional fish dishes.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“I went to the same farm for a month from my first year of high school until my third year. Although I worked there every day, I switched from one work unit to another every few days. My home was close to the farm, but I wasn’t allowed to go home and was forced to work. They were afraid that I might refuse to come back when I realized how exhausting the work was. There were 2-3 students in homes that were close in proximity to the work units. The work units provided meals, but our parents also packed additional snacks because they knew how tiring the work was. The meals provided by the work units were the same every day, so they didn’t taste very good.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

5.3 Comparison of Local and Long-term Agricultural Labor Support

Table 4 – Agricultural Labor Support Comparisons ¹⁸

Distinctions	Local	Long-term
Location	The school decided the terms with each farm (usually, farm near the school).	The government decides (usually a distance far enough that a vehicle is necessary to get to the farm).
Duration of Work	Every day. Can differ based on the region and the school.	1 month to 40 days.
Labor Hours	From 2 o'clock in the afternoon until late afternoon or sunset (if there is a lot of work to do, they would work until after sunset).	From dawn until sunset.

¹⁸ In North Korea, regional and long term rural mobilization is not distinguished.

Distinctions	Local	Long-term
Accommodation	Are able to return home at night.	Sleep at the farm.
Meals	After having lunch at home, the students would gather at the school to get to the farm and return in the evening. The farm does not provide meals.	The farm sometimes provides meals, but usually the students bring ingredients and cook themselves.
Students' Age	Often from elementary school, though it depends on the school.	From high school (14-15 years old).
Distributions of Profits	A certain amount of harvest would be given by the farm to be used for the cost of running the school, or the principal could just keep it.	The school does not receive any profit because it is a governmental program.

5.4 Accidents During Labor Support

“I struck my hand by mistake while cutting a sheaf of bean with a sickle. I was 12 years old, a fourth grader in elementary school. I still have the scar in my hand. I could see my bone at that time.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

The Agricultural Labor Support results in severe injuries due to its rigorous and labor-heavy nature. Several types of farm labor require the use of dangerous tools, such as sickles, hoes, and pickaxes. Children are not physically capable nor experienced enough to operate them. As a result, injuries are common.

The North Korean government claims its commitment to “the system of universal free medical service” in Article 56 of its 2016 Constitution, and Article 5 of the 2010 Children’s Rights Protection Act emphasizes that children, out of all citizens, should enjoy the benefits of universal free education and medical service the most.¹⁹ Article 33 of the latter act then

¹⁹ Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Supreme People’s Assembly, “*Constitution of North Korea 2016.*”; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, “*2010 Children’s Rights Protection Act Order 1307,*” 2010.

specifies the terms:

“The government pays for all of the costs that are used to prevent or cure children’s diseases such as the cost for examination, lab experiments, medicine, hospitalization, rehabilitation center, transportation cost for getting to and from the rehabilitation center, cost for general check-up, consultation with the doctor, and vaccination.”²⁰

However, these guarantees are not executed. Regardless of the severity of injuries acquired during the government-mandated labor, no medical treatment is made available to students.

To make matters worse, the work environment at the farms is conducive to injuries. Students face scorching heat and harsh weather conditions, and there is a lack of proper clothing and equipment to protect students from sharp tools or leeches and other insects. Both the North Korean government and the school system knowingly place children in abominable working conditions.

²⁰ Ibid.

“I once severely injured my hand during an autumn harvest. A piece of flesh almost fell off. My sister took care of it only when I got home. They didn’t do anything about it on the field. The people on the farm and the nurses went home early, so they couldn’t do anything for me. My homeroom teacher wouldn’t do anything for me either. She was rather upset with me and said, ‘You should have been more careful!’ I was frustrated. I felt like the teacher hated me. Of course I didn’t mean to hurt myself, but she was so mean about it. The teacher didn’t like that I hurt myself since other students would have to do my work as well.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“There were a lot of instances when students used a hoe or a sickle incorrectly. For example, sometimes students struck others around them when they meant to cut corn. Of course the children bled. There were also those who hit others behind them while using a pickaxe.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“If you hurt yourself while working, they don’t do anything about it and just send you back home. Once I hurt myself, and I applied fermented soybean paste when I got back home to stop bleeding, but the method is not based on sound medical knowledge. It’s just a traditional home remedy, that’s all.

When we went to plant seeds one day at 5 in the morning, I went into the water to plant seeds, and the water was too cold. We have rain boots here [in South Korea], but we just went in barefoot there. Soon afterwards, leeches stuck to my legs. The children working at that time were all young and short, so for some of them, the water reached their thighs. They were in third or fourth years of elementary school. Our feet kept sinking when we stood still because it was a field, so we had to keep moving. And by the time it was 10 am, the sunlight was too intense.”

- Hong Hye-Jin

5.5 Punishments for Failure to Participate in Labor Support

“Even if you detest the work, you can’t run away from it. If you run away, you will be criticized during the entire semester. Communal lifestyles are scary. It feels like the community is important, but you yourself are not’. Because I did not want to be excluded from a group, I think I just endured it. If you don’t report to your community or participate in its activities, they blame you saying, ‘You think you’re the only one who’s important, not the community’. North Korea operates on systems that surveil you through community organization. People don’t like leaving these organizations and instead criticize those acting independently because they believe that these are the people who degenerate a community. When I think back now, it seems like I felt like I was always told to ‘live under supervision.’ They seemed to prevent anyone from running away.”

- **Koo Dong-Su**

Inevitably, students attempt to leave after morning classes or skip school in order to avoid the

Agricultural Labor Support. These students suffer various forms of punishment, including physical, verbal/critical, and relational. With severe punishment facing those missing the Agricultural Labor Support without permission, it becomes even more obligatory and oppressive to children.

5.5.1 Physical Punishments

As with most countries which forbid severe corporal punishment, North Korea also has in place regulations against it. Article 26 of the Children's Rights Protection Act of 2010 identifies cursing, interrogation, contempt, and physical punishment as strictly prohibited acts performed on a child. However, because this law is not enforced, not only are North Korean children exposed to abuse by their teachers, the perpetrators do not face any consequences.

Students regularly suffer corporal punishment as a part of the Agricultural Labor Support. Teachers will ruthlessly beat students who fail to attend or do their work properly.

“When I tried to go home after morning classes without attending the Agricultural Labor Support, my teacher reprimanded and hit me. Teachers can't do that here in

South Korea, but they can in North Korea.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“The school asked us to work every day even during breaks, so we went to break gravel or collect scrap paper and scrap iron. We also went to the Agricultural Labor Support. If we didn’t, we got physical punishment from teachers. They hit our palms, thighs, or calves with a pointing stick 10 times or more. They were merciless....”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

“There was a time I was beat up when I didn’t do my work properly. I didn’t want to do it at that time, so I skipped it with my friends. I had finished everything that I was told to do that day by my teacher. My task was to transport one ton of excretions with an ox cart. I finished it by 5 o’clock although I had until 6 to finish it, and the teacher told me to do more. That’s because the teachers could look good if they gave away more verification papers to the students. I asked the teacher if I could take a break, and she beat me saying that I wasn’t obedient. She was a very competitive woman. She

insisted that our class work more than other classes do. The teacher swore at me in front of other students. I wanted to piss her off, so I just sang in front of her. She got really angry and beat me a lot with some documents she was holding.

And with another male teacher, I was beaten a lot on my legs with a wooden stick.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

5.5.2 Verbal Punishments

Students who failed to attend the Agricultural Labor Support are both rebuked by their teachers and other students during a Struggle Session (*sa-sang-tu-jeng*), in which students accuse one another of capitalism and reactionary ideology. Additionally, they are exposed to open criticism from their peers through a social system called “*saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*.” *Saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* translates as “Life Review Session,” and it is a “weekly gathering to review and reflect on one’s ideas and acts according to the teachings of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il or Kim Jong-Un, or the Ten Principles.”²¹

²¹ “Korean-English Glossary of North Korean Human Rights Terms,” *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*, (2016).

It is mandatory for every North Korean citizen to attend *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* arranged by his or her individual party-affiliated organization. These organizations include the Korean Workers' Alliance, the Korea Democratic Women's Union, and the Korean Farmers Alliance, which adults belong to, and the Korean Children's Union and the Kimilsungist-Kimjongilist Youth League, to which children belong. Therefore, all North Korean children and adults participate in *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* every week. Even when students avoid agricultural labor, they cannot avoid *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*.

During *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*, certain students are targeted by the whole class and bombarded with scathing remarks. These scarring comments manipulate victimized students to participate in the Agricultural Labor Support against their will in order to avoid future condemnation.

“Our class was co-ed, and the teacher would say to the lazier students in an insulting manner, “You don’t even behave like a human; you’re too lazy.” In my second year of high school, I was punished once for not going to the farm. I was so embarrassed. It was unfair, and I felt angry in front of my male classmates. And I felt more disobedient because I was going through puberty. When we were

physically punished with the teacher's pointer stick, we would take it and intentionally break it because we were trying to be defiant. But we would show up to work the next day then act out later, repeatedly."

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

"We had sa-sang-tu-jeng starting in middle school. One time, there was a student who ran away from a military training and the Agricultural Labor Support, and every student in his entire grade level targeted this one student during sa-sang-tu-jeng."

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

"In North Korea, if you didn't work, you would be crushed during saeng-hwal-chong-hwa. There would be immense criticism, so physical labor was something to be expected and unavoidable."

- **Koo Dong-Su**

5.5.3 Punishments from Peers

Apart from physical and verbal punishments in the North Korean education system, there is also punishment from peers. Classmates discipline each

other, mainly through bullying (outside of *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*). This form of bullying exists for three chief reasons. First, each student's work has to be completed regardless of his/her attendance status. Classmates of a student who avoids the Agricultural Labor Support are expected to divide up the missing student's work and complete it themselves. Every student who avoids the Agricultural Labor Support increases the workload for the remaining students. As a result, these young children direct their frustration at their classmates who seem to be burdening them by skipping school.

Second, the collective frustration is fueled all the more when the classmates, who showed up to the Agricultural Labor Support, believe that their situation is unfair. When one student misses work without permission, they have to labor while that one person does not. Thus, they complain about the irresponsibility of those who miss the Agricultural Labor Support and harass them together.

Third, the teacher often sends other students to the home of the student who misses school or the Agricultural Labor Support in order to bring him or her back to school. The distance is of no importance and the students must travel to their classmates' homes, often by foot, to relay the message of the teacher persuading them to attend school.

As more peers are involved in the enforcement of punishments, the severity of punishments becomes

more unbearable.

“Some students were told to sing on the way to the house of those who didn’t attend the Agricultural Labor Support. It was to embarrass them for not going. I remember walking a very long distance because we still had to do it for those who lived far away.”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

“If you miss class once, the teacher would send two other students to find you. If you still didn’t show up, the teacher would personally go to your house. This is why we basically went to school every day. Even if your family was too poor and it was very difficult for you to go to school, if teacher ordered you to come to school, you had no other choice but to listen.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

6

Item Collections

6.1 Government-Run Children's Initiative

"For the Children's Initiative, we collected scrap paper, old rags, bottles, and scrap iron once every season. In elementary school, the Children's Union Director told us to collect 5 pieces of rabbit hide once a

year.²² In middle school, the Youth League Secretary had us bring rabbit hide towards the end of the year.”

- Park Ji-Uk

Accompanied by other postwar mass movements, such as the Brick Collection Campaign, the Children’s Initiative started in the spring of 1954 under the leadership of Kim Jong-Il during the post-Korean War restoration period.²³ At first, there were official rounds of the Children’s Initiative, for example the 5-Year Children’s Initiative and the 7-Year Children’s Initiative during the 1950s and 1960s. But even after the completion of its initial mission of reconstruction, this practice continued and has become embedded in the education system as an integral activity for all students, from elementary through high school.

The Children’s Initiative refers to assignments given to students by the government through the school system, starting in elementary school, to bring a wide range of supplies, materials, and goods on a yearly basis. As defined by North Korean defectors, the Children’s

²² Elementary school version of the Youth League Director. A teacher who is responsible for Children’s Union within the school. See Figure A.3 Command structure of the Children’s Initiative within the school system

²³ “Fiscal Segmentation and a Variety of Taxes in North Korea,” *Korea Institute for National Unification*, (December 2013).

Initiative is a plan carried out by students with the goal of providing practical help to the nation. Every year, each student in North Korea is assigned to submit a predetermined quantity of items to school. The type and number of items demanded vary across region and grade level.

The items students have to bring under the Children's Initiative include: scrap papers, scrap iron, scrap rubber, scrap copper, scrap bronze, scrap aluminum, scrap glass, scrap rags, manure (human feces), medicinal plants (e.g. shepherd's purse, water dropwort, wild rocambole), pickled food, rabbit hide, mittens, etc. The government determines the items and the quantity for the children to bring in a year. However, each school arranges an independent collection schedule. For example, a school may decide to collect 10 kg of scrap iron from each student every 3 months if the government order called for 40 kg of scrap iron by the end of the year. It is inferred from the defector testimonies that schools tend to allot a longer time period for scarcer and more costly items, such as rabbit hide. All the same, children are shackled to labor at all times since the Children's Initiative is a year-long project.

“Once every 3 months, the school gave a quota for scrap paper, gravel, etc. They also asked for dog and cow dung.”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

“Without exception, there was at least one order every month. After the students finished one assignment, they were given another one the following month... They had to collect scrap iron every month, year-round.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

“We had to turn in something to the school once a month. When they asked for compost, we went around to pick up animal dung. During the water dropwort season, we brought in 10 kg of water dropwort. They asked for 3 pieces of rabbit hide to support the People’s Army, but it was for the teachers in reality.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

The amount of each item assigned varies as well and usually increases with grade level.

“We had to bring scrap iron, rubber, papers and rags. The monthly standard was 15 kg of scrap iron, 500 g of scrap rubber, 500 g of scrap sacks, 1 kg of scrap paper, and 2 pieces of rabbit hide. It continued from elementary to middle school, every month.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“In elementary school, we were ordered to bring 5 kg of pickled food and 1kg of dried food. In middle and high school, it was three times the amount in elementary school (15 kg of pickled food and 3 kg of dried food).”

- **Lee Sun-Ri**

“Each of us collected and submitted 5 kg of scrap iron, 1-2 kg of scrap paper, and 1 kg of manure every 3 months.”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

“There was no major difference among elementary, middle, and high school, except that the amount of workload increased. Rabbit hide required increased by two times and the scrap iron increased by 12 kg. The amount of money needed also increased.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

The array of items that the government orders students to bring lays an oppressive, inescapable burden of child labor on them. In addition to the exorbitant amounts, some items are nearly impossible to gather in North Korea. For example, no one can find a

piece of scrap iron, let alone over 10 kg, because there is almost no scrap iron in North Korea. Since the mid-1990s, North Korea sold close to all of its scrap iron to China, and others smuggled it abroad, resulting in a scarcity of iron.²⁴ Compost (human feces) is also difficult to bring because there is a quantitative limit, and it cannot be bought. Therefore, for children to bring astronomical amounts of such unobtainable items at regular intervals imposes significant emotional stress.

“When the school asked for scrap iron, I tried to sneak a lid of an iron pot from home and got caught. My grandmother said, ‘I would rather they ask for tuition...’”

- **Kim Ji-Yeon**

“In the winter, we went around to pick up compost. Each of us had a partner, and we took a handcart to restrooms to steal dung. We have even fought over who’s going to keep the feces we collected. Feces was the most difficult thing to bring because you could buy all other requested items but this and also

²⁴ Jung Young, “Children’s Initiative is Huge Burden for Children’s Union,” *Radio Free Asia*, 5th June 2013, http://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/media_in_out/nkmediaanalysis-06052013133712.html.

because there was always a shortage of it. Every family saved up their family members' feces during the winter to turn it in later."

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

"It was really boring, hard, and distressing. Learning the revolutionary ideology every day, completing the Children's Initiative, and walking around the city singing - all these things were arduous."

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

"I would rather pay tuition... We were bringing something in at least once a week. When we met for saeng-hwal-chong-hwa, they always announced having a new Children's Initiative assignment the upcoming week."

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

The body responsible for the Children's Initiative is the North Korean government. In order to make the purpose of these assignments seem legitimate, the government makes claims that these items are necessary to send to the military, make textbooks, build

infrastructure and fund special events, holidays, and political campaigns. None of these justifications are valid because there is no legitimate reason that gives ground for child labor. Yet the rationales are iterated persistently to the students through the command chain.

The North Korean government provides a wide variety of pretexts to justify these endless Children's Initiative assignments that shackle children to demanding labor. Article 47 of the 2016 Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea states, "The State shall provide education to all pupils and students free of charge and grant allowances to students at universities and colleges."²⁵ Other laws, such as the Education Act of 2007 and the General Education Act of 2011, promise punitive action for any entity that impedes students' education and impose prohibition on mobilizing students to work unrelated to the execution of an educational platform without the approval of a pertinent institution. Ironically, the North Korean government is the very entity that designs, develops, implements, evaluates, and oversees projects it has outlawed. Knowing that these orders would inevitably coerce children into laboring through foraging, it micromanages the entire Children's Initiative process.

²⁵ Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Supreme People's Assembly, "*Constitution of North Korea 2016.*"

“We were given the People’s Army Support Project to provide support for the People’s Army or the Shock Troops (laborers who wore military uniforms). It was basically paying money, but for the People’s Army, we would provide underwear and food (rice, eel, eggs, beef, pork, etc). The teachers would choose a menu and tell us to pack a lunchbox. But even with the lunchbox, they gave us strict guidelines to follow: the quantity of rice and side dishes, the overall quality, etc. And our parents would make it for us. We needed to do this once or twice every month. Once or twice a month, we always had to bring something.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“And for the Children’s Initiative, we collected scrap paper (to make textbooks), scrap glass, scrap rubber (to send to shoe factories), and other various things to ‘donate’ periodically.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

“Water dropworts were popular because they were apparently sent to the troops

and hospitals that treated hepatitis.

In the winter, we turn in pine trees as firewood.

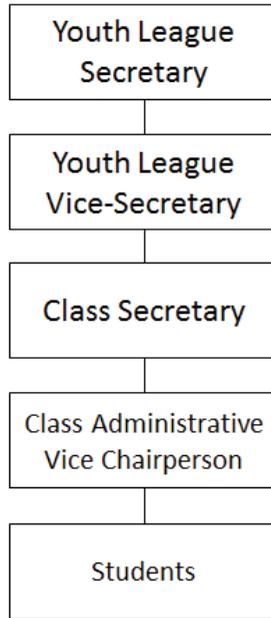
One time, my younger sibling cried and begged for things to take to school, and my mother got them from somewhere.

They always asked for too many things. Scrap bronze, scrap aluminum, scrap copper, scrap glass, shepherd's purse (plant), water dropwort (plant), wild rocambole (plant), Solomon's seal (plant), yams, grasshoppers, dried radish leaves..."

- **Lee Sun-Ri**

The children's Initiative is propagated through the Youth League within the school and the goods are collected by them. The system of delivery is as follows.

Figure 1 - Structure of the Youth League for Children's Initiative.



6.2 Other Government-Run Collections

In addition to the annual Children's Initiative, there are other government-run item collections for students. The umbrella North Korean term for all government orders relayed to students is *pochi*, which broadly means "facilitating a project by dividing team tasks and sharing operations manuals".²⁶ Therefore, *pochi* includes orders of not only item collections, like the

²⁶ "Korean-English Glossary of North Korean Human Rights Terms," *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*, (2016).

Children's Initiative, but also monetary donations and societal and political assignments, such as participating in political events, cleaning statues, supporting the People's Army, etc.

At school, children frequently receive a *pochi* from the government through the same channel of communication used for the Children's Initiative. Taking the Youth League as an example, the orders of various assignments organized by the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea are disseminated through the chain of command (passed down from the national Youth League all the way to the school Youth League and then announced to individual students by the Class Secretary in each homeroom). This process as well as the government order itself is known as *pochi* among students.

“The Youth League Secretary or Class Secretary would say, ‘I’ll deliver a pochí right now,’ and told us to bring money or various items.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

Besides the Children's Initiative, the main categories of *pochi* received by students include the Doing Good Work Campaign, the People's Army Support Project, the Construction Site Support Project, etc. First, the Doing Good Work Campaign consists of

activities that benefit society. Its central component is the School Management Campaign, which involves the cleaning and beautification of school.

“Doing Good Work Movement is for the school’s maintenance, such as planting trees, collecting gravel, making the railroad even, weeding, cleaning, etc. (similar meaning to the Saemaeul Movement in South Korea).²⁷ It was either organized by the Youth League or the school.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“In middle school, we occasionally went outside to do activities like weeding, watering trees, cleaning surrounding areas of statues of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il to show respect.”

- **Choi Eun-Young**

“The government assigns each school to go to a certain area every Saturday to plant and take care of trees. Who would

²⁷ The Saemaeul Movement was created by the former South Korean dictator, Park Chung-Hee, to revitalize rural areas of the South. The central government provided materials to a village, and that community collaborated to decide what they intended to build. The movement declined in the 1980s.

do this kind of work if elementary school students don't (in North Korea)?"

- Kim Yeon-Ri

"From elementary school to high school, we went to water plants and pull out grass seeds. We went to some places every Saturday and to others occasionally. In 2013 and 2014, there were many national campaigns for planting grass to make the streets look clean (between the road and the sidewalk). I went to plant and water grass every week. They also collected money for grass seeds."

- Kim Jin-Joo

Second, the People's Army Support Project is an item collection carried out to aid North Korean soldiers. Toiletries, rabbit hide, lunchboxes, and socks are among the staple goods demanded by the government.

"As for the People's Army Support Project, on April 25th (Military Foundation Day), August 25th (Day of Songun), July 27th (Day of Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War), and December 24th (Day commemorating Kim Jong-Il's appointment as the

Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army in 1991 and Kim Jong-Suk²⁸'s birthday), students who were selected as committee members delivered food, belts made of rabbit hide, gloves, socks, scarves, etc. to soldiers.”

- Park Dae-Hun

“As for the students’ Policy Assignment²⁹, they were given a ‘seon-gun business’. ‘Seon-gun business’ meant ‘protect the leader with gun stock,’ with the gun stock representing a soldier. There were People’s Army Support Project materials required for the soldiers, where they would prepare them on June 25th, July 27th, and August 15th. Because other students had to purchase the same goods as well, it was always a struggle to buy everything that was requested.

²⁸ It is called as the wife of Kim Il Sung, the son of Kim Jong Il, and the third commander of Baekdu Mountain, and is being educated as a protector of anti-Japanese sentiments of North Korea that helped Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese movement.

²⁹ A Policy Assignment is a task ascribed by the government to groups and/or individuals usually once they reach adulthood and encompasses a wide variety of duties they must perform such as forced labor and item collections

Eventually, this high demand led to an increase in suppliers.

The goods required were toiletries (e.g. toothpaste and toothbrush), mittens, footwraps (similar to socks), which were turned over along with things like wild vegetables.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“For the People's Army, we collected rabbit hide and 1 kg of wild chives and then delivered them to a nearby army base on April 25th, the Military Foundation day.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“To support the People’s Army on April 25th and July 27th, we collected herbs, rabbit hide, and meat, made vests for the Army, and raised rabbits.”

- **Kim Ji-Yeon**

“We had to send food (e.g. rabbit and dog meat) and letters to the People’s Army on April 25th (Military Foundation Day) and December 24th (Kim Jong-Suk’s birthday).”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

Third, the Construction Site Support Project is another item collection of meals, snacks, and construction materials and supplies to support workers at construction sites and to expedite the construction process.

“In remembrance of Kim Jong Suk’s 90th Birthday, there were numerous construction projects for museums and propaganda galleries in progress in the city of Hoeryong. Therefore, the government demanded a lot – money, glass, cement, and other materials as such.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“They told us to pack lunchboxes and bring work gloves to give to the people working at construction sites.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

There are more types of *pochi*, such as monetary donations, that students must comply with. Because a *pochi* is relayed to students from the government as new needs emerge, students never have a day without the burden of item collections on their backs.

“Rejecting a new task because we were already doing other tasks out of the

question; we have to take on multiple assignments. We always have 4-5 things going on every month. On average, something new every week.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“We collected allegiance funds for the Kim family. In North Korean money, we would have to bring 5,000 to 10,000 Korean People’s Won (KPW). If you paid 50,000 KPW or more, the school would give you a certificate and give you compliments. And when the students were collecting scrap metal, they said they were making a tank named, ‘The Children.”

- Yoon Kang-Sook

“If the school’s ideology education needed to pay for a ‘Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il Research Center’, it would calculate how much each class needed to bring. Then they would say to bring the money for reasons such as, ‘Research Center Improvement funds,’ ‘The People’s Army Support,’ ‘Shock Troops Aid,’ and ‘Improving the Pyongyang Nampo Highway Aid”

- Yoon Sul-Mi

“On Kim Il-Sung’s and Kim Jong-Il’s birthdays, we had to turn in ‘loyalty items’ or ‘devotion items’, such as equipment necessary to clean the revolutionary history laboratory (e.g. duster for the portraits, broom, dustpan, bucket, slippers, etc.).

In order to secure party funds, the school asked us to bring things with monetary value, such as herbs or acorns, once a year around summer. However, if we couldn’t obtain the items, we ‘voluntarily’ turned in money.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

“In middle school, we had to make monetary donations for things called ‘support project,’ ‘national planning,’ and ‘power plant support project.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

6.3 School-Run Item Collections

Apart from the government-run item collections under *pochi*, there is yet another type of item collection, one under the direct supervision of the school. School-run *pochi* is organized and planned by a school's high-ranking officials, such as the principal. Teachers do not order school-run collections, but they may take a portion of the collections or demand additional work from the students. This work from teachers serves a private purpose, in comparison to the communal purpose of school-run item collections. Unlike the structure of the government-run collections (e.g. Children's Initiative), in which teachers lack an official role, collections initiated by the school appoint teachers to a more influential position and pass down the orders from the school executives to their students.

All educational institutions, including schools, in North Korea should receive sufficient funding, educational materials, and building maintenance aid from the government and be able to operate without significant financial constraints. If these arrangements were to be fulfilled, schools would be able to devote resources, including human capital, to educating students and developing each student's potential.

However, the reality is that the North Korean government neglects its promises to assist schools. The government disregards its obligation to provide

educational materials to schools, but more problematically, it ignores its role as the budget appropriator, which generates deeper complications in the North Korean education system. In order for schools to make up for the government's unfulfilled duty, they have to earn their own funds, and they deem the exploitation of their students as the appropriate solution.

“There are no operational costs provided by the government. That’s why the schools kept asking a bunch of items from the students. The teachers had students bring everything the school needed.”

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

“The justifications the school gave were that they were building a storehouse or a dormitory, but the real reason was that they needed money to operate. Since it would be illegal to collect tuition, my school gathered parents to have them donate money to build a pigsty.”

- **Moon Yoon-Ji**

For example, Article 16 of the General Education Act, which requires the central educational institution to promptly publish and distribute textbooks and reference books at the start of every new school year, goes

unexecuted. Instead, the North Korean Ministry of Education demands money from schools under the *pochi* in exchange for textbooks. Schools without a treasury as a result instruct students to collect waste papers to meet the textbook expenses.

“The Ministry of Education gives out assignments too. For example, the Ministry demands money from schools for textbooks, and our school had us gather waste papers at first. But when collecting papers did not go well as expected, it then had us bring scrap iron or dig brackens (more profitable items) to send them directly to the Ministry.”³⁰

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

Schools even lack the funding to afford heating in the winter, so the burden of providing heating also falls on the students. All the defectors interviewed by PSCORE lived in different areas of North Korea but have consistently pointed to firewood as one of the staple items asked by the schools. Therefore, it can be deduced that nearly every school in North Korea does not receive even the most basic finances to afford fuel, so the schools rely on the students. The methods of obtaining fuel vary: some interviewees testified that they

³⁰ Brackens are edible plants.

had to hike a mountain to gather and cut firewood; others shared that they were told implausible excuses to bring money or other items, such as corn or rice. Other than those who live in Pyongyang, most students and their families do not have the financial means to simply buy firewood or the substitute items, such as rice. As a result, children resort to cutting firewood themselves in the mountain or forest.

“In the winter, they made an excuse (e.g. punishment for being late or not doing homework) to have us bring firewood for heating.”

- **Park Ji-Uk**

“Once, the school told students to each bring 5 kg of corn to buy coals for heating. 5 kg of corn is equivalent to 3 days’ worth of food for a family of 4.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“Bringing firewood to school meant I had to cut wood in the mountain. I went 5 times every 2-3 days during winter. After I came back I was too tired, so I couldn’t go everyday. On the days I went to collect firewood, I started early in the morning, and worked until late at night around 9-10 pm. The next day I had morning classes

and stacked the wood I brought neatly in the afternoon. It was 4 hours round trip to reach the mountain for firewood. It was not a straight road; I had to cross a river, mountain, and hill. Along the way, I drew the handcart and carried fallen trees, bark, and branches. I couldn't cut down trees because the forest overseer was present. In order to peel the bark off the pine trees, I had to take a hatchet (1 per person), hand cart (1 per 2 people), and 3 gunny sacks. We all had to meet our quotas, so it took a long time. You start working from 1st grade of elementary school.”

- Lee Eun-Jo

“During winter I gathered firewood, cutting the trees myself. Once every week I exchanged my firewood for coal from the coal mine. It was really grueling to gather firewood. I walked for 2 hours to cut wood and brought it back for another 2 hours. I went out in the morning at 9 am and came back around 6 pm. Sometimes when I was late I came back at 9 pm, but usually, it was around 7:30 pm because the sun went down. I would go to gather wood for two days returning home each

night, then resting at home for a day and going to school the very next day.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“It was very tough to collect wood from mountains. People already collected all the wood near the villages, so we needed to travel far to find it. When we need to work until after the sunset, we stayed where we were until our eyes adjusted to the dark. We were stuck together and could barely see anything. There was no proper roads or signs.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

Item collections administered by the school, including the fuel and waste paper collections, came to exist because of the North Korean government’s failure to honor its obligations to finance educational institutions, including teachers’ salaries and cost of school supplies. The role initially held by the government is imposed on the schools, who in turn force children to perform onerous item collections to gain needed supplies and finances.

6.3.1 Items, Money, and Labor for Teachers

Item collections that serve the teachers and

school administration came to be inevitable due to the North Korean government's poor administration. Article 17 of the General Education Act promises prioritizing the provision of food, as well as school supplies and other living necessities, to teachers and students at a nominal price. But similarly to the other laws, this clause is disregarded; the government only offers teachers mere subsistence. According to defectors, they are not given the adequate salaries they are entitled to. Thus, in the same way schools initiate their own item collections for operation, teachers must have their students bring items for survival.

As reported by the defectors, teachers are not even close to affording food with their salaries. A former middle school music teacher shared that her monthly wages were 1,500 Korean People's Won (KPW), which was worth 300g of rice (1kg of rice cost 4,500 KPW). Though their salaries are insufficient, in rare situations, teachers are required by the government and school to donate money, just like the students are required to bring items. Reasons for these donations include the People's Army Support, management of the school, purchases of school supplies, etc.

"I never received salary although I was a teacher for a couple of months. I heard that it went to support the People's Army, so I never received it. The monthly salary was 1,500 KPW, but I was told to pay

more than 10,000 KPW every month. I had to pay this amount for school adornment, textbooks, and support for the People's Army. I had to pay for the sake of repairing and improving the school too. Salary didn't have any meaning; I only knew how much it was."

- Yoon Sul-Mi

Teachers, students, and parents often share a familial bond in North Korea. An intimate relationship like this is accompanied by a sense of commitment to help. As a consequence, students wish to help their teachers in any way possible. And teachers naturally mobilize their students to supplement their scanty wages. Students brought rice, firewood for the winter, cigarettes, lunch, etc. for teachers. At some schools, the parent-teacher association of each homeroom organized an independent donation of money or other necessities.

"Some of the goods that I gathered for the teacher included rice, firewood for the wintertime, and glass for school. Because I did not want to go out to work in the fields, I would bribe the teachers with rice, sugar, snacks for other students, cigarettes, and lunch boxes. If ordered to gather money and goods [from the government], the teachers told the students to gather a little more than the

necessary amount so that they could take some for themselves. Teachers could barely make a living. We all pitied them. They received (almost) no salary or rations. Students didn't have to go to classes when they didn't want to, but teachers had to because they had classes. They wouldn't have been able to make a living at all if there were no students - when they had a wedding or other ceremonial occasions, they asked students for money or other goods and supplies."

- Yoon Sul-Mi

"Sometimes we also collect money. Parents' meetings are held in the beginning of August and at the end of December. We usually talk about two things: grades - who is good at academics, who is bad at academics, and who works hard - and lifestyle- who was late to class, who was absent, who came to work, etc. The chairman of the parents' committee decides on how much money to collect and starts collecting it from the parents. If some parents are absent in the meeting, their children are told how much money to bring to school. Therefore, it's the parents who end up paying this

money. Then, the teacher also gets to know who paid how much. The teachers think that their abilities are represented by how much money they receive. When people see teachers who do not receive much money, they think, 'How badly did they teach their students to deserve only that much money...'"

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

Teachers exploit these attachments in order to subsist and support their own families. However, in rural regions, where students cannot afford to give direct financial aid to teachers, their labor substitutes for money and items, even if it is work inappropriate for children. Teachers ask students to work at their personal fields and gardens, babysit their children, and do other personal chores. In a sense, in the place of item collections, students are turned to other forms of child labor, due to the demands of teachers.

For instance, one of the defectors recalls that she helped with her teacher's *kimchang*, which is kimchi-making for the winter. Because kimchi is the main dish Koreans eat in the winter due to the dearth of food, *kimchang* entails significant labor because of the sheer amount of cabbages that need to be washed, pickled, washed again, seasoned, and stored away. As the testimony below reveals, *kimchang* is work inappropriate for children.

“Teachers had students work at their homes for personal purposes.”

- **Kim Ki-Hoon**

“When we didn’t go out to Agricultural Labor Support, we helped with the teacher’s vegetable garden.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“I found it too exhausting to go out every day to do physical labor, so instead I babysat my teacher’s child for one year when I was eleven. I was a young child myself, but I had to change the diapers and take care of the six-month-old baby for free from 2 pm until the teacher came back from work. Babysitting was also strenuous, but it was better than the back-breaking physical labor.”

- **Choi Ju-Yeon**

“I even prepared kimchi for my teacher. At that time, I loved being summoned by my teacher. I did not realize it back then, but now I know that this was a form of child abuse.

When I was in third grade of middle

school (age 13-14), I would carry 500 kg of pickled cabbages that the teacher prepared from the 5th floor, where my teacher's house was, to the first floor. Then I would load all of them into a cart and pull it all the way to the riverside, which was at a 2-hour distance. It was wintertime, and because I had no gloves, my hands would become raw and frozen. My whole body was wet and freezing. I would go to the river and wash all the cabbages in the ice-cold water and carry all of it back to my teacher's house on the 5th floor. I had to finish all of this within a day because the cabbages cannot be pickled for too long. Four small kids would do all of this hard work. The teachers would treat these students well, and the students who did not do the work would bring some snacks for the working students. At the time, I thought that helping my teacher in this way was a matter of course.

In rural areas, the students do not have money or valuable goods so they offer manual labor and tend to the teacher's fields. Everyone takes part in harvesting and collect manure, which the parents make after talking amongst themselves.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

“The teachers would make children do even these kinds of works: looking after the teacher's children (taking them to the daycare and bring them back), making kimchi for the teacher (About 50kg of kimchi was made per person since it is the only side dish in North Korea), repairing the teacher's house (There was a case where the children were told to dig along the layer of mud in the tunnel that collapsed and killed those children. However, the teacher did not go to jail.), delivering the teacher's potato rations (There was another incident where the children carrying the potato sacks on the truck died after falling off the vehicle. The teacher also did not go to jail.), and doing all the farming work if the teacher owned a farming field.”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

While some of these activities may seem voluntary (since there are cases in which the teachers asked for student volunteers), they are still forced labor in nature. These examples of child labor are a direct result of the North Korean government's failure in fulfilling its obligations. Teachers, who are unable to

make a living, even with a job, selfishly take advantage of their students. While this does not condone or absolve teachers of forcing child labor, it is important to remember that teachers too, are victims under the North Korean education system.

Ultimately, although the school-run item collections and teachers' private work are not directly planned and carried out by the North Korean government, the government is still aware of their existence. The government should be cognizant of its failure to honor its duties and the consequences thereof.

6.4 Schedule of Item Collections

6.4.1 During the School Semester

Foraging for items and performing other labor, such as the Agricultural Labor Support and construction work, takes place after school because students have class in the morning until early afternoon. Afterward, they go around looking for items or are sent to a farm for the Agricultural Labor Support, to a building construction or repair, to a political event or campaign, etc.

“We usually studied in the morning and worked in the afternoon. We did everything they required us to do - farming, construction, digging dirt, gathering human feces (for fertilizing

purposes). It was like this all year long.”

- Kim Ki-Hoon

Students have to collect items year-round since there are many different types of item collections (Children’s Initiative, Policy Assignment, People’s Army Support Project, Construction Site Support Project, School Management, etc.). As the assigned quantity of each item is substantial, students do not have much time to gather them. As a result, they go searching for items after school nearly every day. Even when they have other obligations, such as the Agricultural Labor Support, they use what little free time they have to try and complete the item collections. Some students even utilize their lunch period to continue collecting everything. While most items are individually gathered, some items, such as firewood, are collectively gathered in some classes. These classes would schedule a time after school or on the weekend to go to the mountains in groups.

“Starting in middle school, we did farm labor from spring until the harvesting season in the fall and went to the mountain to gather firewood in the winter. It was almost everyday after school from 2 pm to 5 or 6 pm. Throughout the school year, the school would constantly assign a one-day, one-week, or one-month

collection period to bring items like scrap iron or copper. We didn't have anything saved when they told us to bring something for the next day, so we went around to collect it right after lunch the same day. In the winter, the whole class scheduled a time on the weekend to gather firewood enough to fill a handcart"

- Jung Yoon-Bo

"We gathered vinyl sheets, cotton sheets, and rubber from trash heaps (from hills of dirt that the villages in the countryside each had). We would also work after school (because of the lack of time), and even had to use our lunch breaks (1 hour long) to pick up items from the trash heaps. We were able gather some from the heaps, but it was never enough.

In North Korea there are no glass windows, they are made out of vinyl. If the school asked me to bring a plastic film(vinyl), I just took it from my home window and stole some from someone's house or a public building. Additionally, other children collected scrap rubber from things like the padding of shoes. I didn't

know where they got it from but it was amazing to see the other children's' ability to gather materials.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

In short, item collections are one of the many categories of child labor that exist in North Korea in addition to the taxing Agricultural Labor Support, construction work, practices for political events and campaigns, etc. Thus, children are always pressed for time to collect exorbitant amounts of items demanded nonstop by the government, school, and teachers. They spend any time they have after school to hurriedly forage for items, contributing to physical fatigue and stress.

6.4.2 During School Breaks

Students do not have time to rest even during their school breaks because they still have collection assignments. Often, many schools give additional assignments to be done over breaks. Even if some schools do not, students stay busy collecting items, since they start preparing for the items that would be asked for after breaks. Because item collections occur throughout the year and are expected annually, they know what kinds of items they need to gather next. As time is one of the limiting factors, students make use of school breaks and holidays to complete as many

assignments as possible. In reality, North Korean children have no real break from child labor.

“During breaks, they asked us to gather 5 pieces of rabbit hide.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“Picking water dropwort was a very overwhelming task. We couldn’t just submit any dried dropwort; it had to be well-dried and of high quality. That’s why I still remember this task. Although summer break is officially a month long, they only give us 20 days. They tell us to come out to school and work. During the summer break, the school had us gather 3 kg of pecans (in North Korea, we called them “Jokgarae” or “Garaetoshi”), 3 kg of hazelnuts, 10 kg of chestnuts (peeled and dried), and 100 shrubby bush clovers (boiled, dried, and peeled). The parents also took part in this task. This task was overwhelming for young children especially, and the parents needed to help them out.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

6.5 Accidents during Item Collections

The endless rounds of item collections pose a threat to the students' physical well-being. Since most North Korean children cannot afford to simply buy the items requested by the school, they have to scavenge any available place to find them, and it is easy to get minor injuries while doing so. But gathering firewood leads to more severe injuries, especially since the only place to do so is thickly-wooded mountains and the task requires dangerous tools like a hand ax. As children are inexperienced with using such tools, they commonly slash themselves or those around them. And since most schools demand firewood during the months leading up to the winter, children often slip and fall as well.

“Here are some of the dangers of working. During early winter, when I was in middle school, we went out to collect firewood in the mountains with axes. The students who didn’t know how to wield an ax properly were hurt often. I still have scars. Then in order to bring down the firewood, we rolled them down the mountain. There were many instances when the children at the bottom were hurt.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“Children were injured after being hit on the back of their hands or on their foot with an ax. And when you work in the winter, it’s common to slip. There are a lot of cases of bleeding and bruising on children’s hand. In the Agricultural Labor Support, children hurt their hands and feet by using a hoe or a sickle, and their backs with a pickaxe. Even though the children have experience working, there was typically a big injury that happens once a year.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

Moreover, children are exposed to mentally traumatizing incidents while foraging for items. During an interview, one defector told that she and her friends saw a corpse of an infant at a local dumping ground:

“We worked during our lunch (to find items). On two separate occasions digging through the trash, I saw the corpse of a child.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

6.6 Punishments for Failure to Complete Item Collections

Despite the dangers, if students fail to complete the item collections, they suffer various forms of punishment. Consequences following the failure to submit all the items contribute to physical harm as well as emotional distress. The three main categories of punishment that occur for Agricultural Labor Support also occur for item collections: physical, verbal/critical, and caused by peers.

6.6.1 Physical Punishments

Children are often financially or physically unable to fulfill the demands of the government and school with respect to item collections. Even so, as the testimonies below illustrate, these students suffer severe corporal punishment.

“The type of punishment students received for the incompleteness of collection assignments depended on the school and the region. But it is not a big deal to get beat up by teachers in North Korea because it is so common.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“When we couldn’t bring the items they asked for, the teachers scolded or physically punished us.”

- **Choi Eun-Young**

“They also asked for fuel in the winter. When I brought in one month’s worth of coals at once, I got to sit next to the heater. But one time in fourth grade, I told the teacher I couldn’t bring it today but I would bring it next time, and he threw a wooden chalk box at me. In middle school, the kids talked about me with scorn when I couldn’t bring in the items. My teacher had me stand in the hallway, and he kick my ankles with his boot. Then another time, he hit me, and my head bumped against the wall. I’ve also had my head struck with a stick and got a lump. I’ve had a teacher smack both sides of my face with an attendance book too. The reasons for physical punishment included not completing the Children’s Initiative (failing to turn in the requested items), skipping school, and not memorizing poems about Kim Jong-Il. When my dad turned in coals or crops to the school, the teacher treated me well. To students who couldn’t bring them, the teacher brutally hit them.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

6.2.2 Verbal Punishments

Verbal punishments are even more common and detrimental than physical punishments due to their systematized structure and the public shame involved. In general, when students fail to bring all the required items, teachers reprimand them in front of their classmates. Some teachers go so far as to insult the students' parents, which can scar the children.

“If we were unable to turn in the items, we were dragged out to the podium, and those who turned in the least items were scolded harshly by teachers in front of everyone. They would refer to the words and teachings of the Supreme Leader to slander and curse the students. They would say, ‘You failed to complete your duty as a student in this people’s economy.’”

- **Lee Sun-Ri**

“They curse at you and make you do physical labor, like cleaning the classroom or the surrounding areas of the school building. You also have to write a self-criticism or reflection paper.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

“If we went to collect firewood and one of our classmates was doing a bad job, the rest of us would have to wait in the cold until that classmate finished. And the teacher would also become impatient and curse: ‘Everyone else is done, why aren’t you? Are you such an idiot that you can’t even do this?’ We hated the classmates who couldn’t work well.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“If the students failed to bring money or items, I would curse at them... I said, ‘Does your mom give a damn about you?’”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

“I never said I was apologetic to my parents even though I was. It was an obvious duty. And, my parents would also help me. I was too scared of what would happen if I didn’t pay (the teacher would hit me). Until you completed the assignments, the teacher would badger you and send kids, who have already completed their assignments, to go over to your house (even at night).”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

Students who fail to complete the item collections are criticized during *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*. *Saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* consists of two components: *ja-gi-bi-pan* and *sang-ho-bi-pan*. *Ja-gi-bi-pan* means self-criticism, a period during which participants reflect on their actions and criticize themselves. In *sang-ho-bi-pan*, or mutual-criticism, participants verbally attack one another by picking flaws and wrongdoings. So during *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*, the teacher first makes students who failed to bring all the items stand up. After they sit back down, every student goes around criticizing him or herself (*ja-gi-bi-pan*). Following this self-criticism, students proceed to denounce a fellow classmate (*sang-ho-bi-pan*). Those who stood up earlier would become the targets during mutual-criticism.

“If we were unable to turn items in, then we were dragged out to be humiliated in front of everyone, so I stole my grandmother’s bronze spoon once to turn it in.”

- **Lee Sun-Ri**

*“The most common topic during *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* was the Children’s Initiative and performance in academics.”*

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“We criticized each other saying things like, ‘How hard do you work for the Party and the Leader?’ and ‘Why are you in Pyongyang if you care about the Party? You should be digging potatoes or coals at a mine.’ We had a big fight during saeng-hwal-chong-hwa.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“During saeng-hwal-chong-hwa, there was sang-ho-bi-pan (mutual criticism). They would make the children who couldn’t bring their items stand and receive their criticism.”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

Teachers also attend the faculty *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*, and those with unsatisfactory class performance are scorned during *sang-ho-bi-pan*, just like the students are. The humiliation they face during these meetings drives them to give harsher physical and verbal punishments to their students as a means to avoid more humiliation in the future. The teachers make their students the scapegoats. Through use of *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*, the government has conditioned its citizens to direct their anger and blame at someone among their peers or someone of a lower status. The teachers and students alike continue this vicious cycle because they do not know better. Unfortunately, the ones at the bottom of the power structure in North Korea

are the young students, so they are often helpless and bear the brunt of *sang-ho-bi-pan*.

“There were a lot of assignments like the Children’s Initiative. They asked for various goods once a week. I was a middle school teacher, and these assignments drove all the teachers crazy too. While we were collecting one thing, there would be an order from above asking for another thing. When we couldn’t collect much things from the students, they criticized us during the faculty saeng-hwal-chong-hwa.”

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

“One time, there was a male student who could not bring all the items. The teacher screamed, ‘You have to bring it all!’ and forced him by cursing and hitting him. If the teachers couldn’t complete the school assignments, the principal would yell at them, and that stress would be passed down to the students. At least the female students were only cursed at and weren’t hit badly.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

6.6.3 Relational Punishments

After being made targets of criticisms, students then struggle with strained relationships with their peers. Their peers treat them in a hostile manner because upon seeing the teachers, to whom they look as role models, act openly antagonistic towards the poor students, they start to believe it is acceptable to act in the same way. As *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* is a system that makes North Korean children accustomed to scapegoating the weak, the public shame their peers experience elicits apathy, not sympathy, and this apathy sometimes intensifies to resentment and results in bullying. Verbal punishment from the teachers inevitably leads to punishment from their peers. In addition, some teachers punish the whole class instead of only the students who failed to complete the collection assignments, which makes the whole class turn against them.

“When a student couldn’t bring rabbit hide, he/she was scolded by the teacher and was teased by other students for being poor. When one student didn’t bring the requested items, the whole class couldn’t go home. Therefore, the classmates bullied that one student who made the whole class stay long at school.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“The parents, afraid that their children would be bullied at school, worked diligently to pay.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

The three types of punishment examined in this section are all equally injurious to young children. Although most defectors reported having experienced or witnessed one or two types, some have seen all three. When one type alone is damaging enough, the combination of all three forms of punishment can lead to extensive physical and emotional trauma. This episode told by one defector interviewee gives a glimpse of the misery caused by all three types of punishment combined:

“If you didn’t bring anything, you’d be criticized during saeng-hwal-chong-hwa, or made an outsider. Some children stopped coming to school altogether because it was too difficult to collect items. The teacher was obvious to show her disdain for the poor children: if they didn’t listen, the teacher would hit them with their pointer stick and curse their parents, “Are your parents really that thoughtless?” Going to school was an obligation, so it was a sin if you missed a day. The teacher would send other children to bring you to school after

classes were over to avoid criticism from other teachers and not be asked why this child wasn't in school.

There was this one girl who was bullied and beaten by her mother. She came to school and was beaten by the teacher too. She did not want to come to school so the teacher sent me and some other students to force her to come. She would hide in the closet when we came so her mother would force her out. We thought we were model students, showing our sense of duty, and being virtuous when we dragged her to school. When she came to school, the teacher would still hit her. Later, she ran away and became a Kkotjebi.³¹ Her mother was shocked. Her mother found her and transferred the girl to another other school.

I was trying to make her into a good student by making her go to school, but now I think I was too cruel. She did not go to the new school and instead ran away and went to live with her grandmother.

³¹ North Korean term for a homeless person or child. The word originated from the Russian word 'кочевник' which means a nomad or wanderer.

She wore a skirt one day and I saw that her legs were covered in bruises. My heart ached after seeing that.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

Having to collect a considerable amount of various items is exhausting by itself. But all the different forms of punishments reserved for those who fail to fill the quota make these item collection campaigns even more distressing for North Korean children. Not only do students spend long hours gathering items at dumping grounds, streets, and their own homes, but the fear of incompleteness and the resulting punishments also loom over them at all times. Regardless of whether North Korea truly needs these items, or this is a result of government indoctrination and incompetence, children should not be engaging in these activities, and they should not have to suffer for failure to complete these impossible tasks.

7

Other Forms of Child Labor within the School System

“Every day, during our break after the second class, the Leader of the Division (the class president of political matters, various political campaigns, events of the propaganda squad, and the choir) of each class would go to the Children’s Union Director’s room (for elementary school) or the Youth League Director’s room (for middle and high school) to report what kinds of discussions were held within

each class and be delivered instructions for what kinds of items the students had to gather. Not only are they told to have to gather items, they are also given instructions on different political campaigns (choir events, mass games, propaganda squad events, Songs of Allegiance performance, or the cleaning of the Man-su-dae statues).³² These also included instructions for the Children Program and the Social Agenda.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

In addition to the item collections and the Agricultural Labor Support, there are other forms of child labor in North Korea that are executed through the education system. Students must participate in construction projects, as well as various performances that take place on national holidays, such as the birthdays of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un, and for other special occasions.

³² The Mansudae statues are two large statues of Kim Il-Song and Kim Jong-il located in Pyongyang.

7.1 Construction Work

“If a student stepped foot in any school building, he/she would be mobilized. No matter how small the child, the teachers would find work that the small child was fit to do.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

In North Korea, the education system serves as an expedited channel for organizing child labor. Students are mobilized for dangerous construction work through the Children’s Union or the Youth League. They have to assist either with municipal infrastructure or for school buildings, under the guidance of school personnel, like the principal. Whenever construction is occurring, whether at schools or at municipal sites, students are expected and forced to work on these construction projects.

7.1.1 Municipal Work

According to defector testimonies, the infrastructure built or maintained by students' labor includes housing, recreational facilities, dams, railroads, and roads. Students receive announcements to mobilize for construction work outside the school in the same way they receive the item collection assignments. They typically carry out these construction and maintenance demands after class, around 1-3 in the afternoon, on the days without the Agricultural Labor Support or other important events. The most prevalent type of construction labor across North Korea seems to be railroad repair, which involves carrying rocks from the river and spreading them across the tracks to make them even.

Figure 2³³ – Children carrying rocks for use on railroad tracks.



³³ Russel Myers, “Child chain gangs of North Korea exposed, as kids as young as five forced to repair railways,” *Mirror UK*, 14th December, 2016. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/child-chain-gangs-north-korea-9460513>.

“From middle school, we had to construct the city swimming pool, which entailed carrying soil, sand, and stones every day (Monday through Saturday) for a month, from 2 pm to until it got dark around 5. We also had to construct apartments occasionally (carrying sand for about 3 to 4 hours) and tidy up railroads free of rocks.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“In the winter, we would go to the nearest power plant and build a dam. They would make us fill up burlap sacks with dirt and bring it to the construction site. We went once a month - but that was because it was so far that we had to take a car. I’m sure if it were closer, we would have gone more frequently.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

Figure 3³⁴ - Students bringing rocks to the railroads.



“There was a ‘Support the Train Tracks Day’ every month. We would go and crush pebbles to flatten the train tracks. And we would also collect dirt from the mountains and make bumpy roads smooth.”

- Yoon Sul-Mi

³⁴ Ibid.

Figure 4³⁵ - Spreading and crushing rocks over railroads.



“To support activities for construction, we collected fine sand and gravel from riverside and carried in handcarts to the construction sites. Each grade level was assigned a quota of labor. When the school principal received an order, saying ‘Collect ten handcarts of sand and gravel for each grade level,’ we had to meet the quota.”

³⁵ Ibid.

They made us work on the pretext that 'the railroads are too rugged for Kim Jong-il to be able to take naps during his train rides for field supervisions.' The railways were usually at the riverside, and our job was to carry the rocks from the river to the railway. We did this during our work hours after class, from 2 to 7 PM. We studied our school material in the morning. We had to do this job about twice every summer, and almost every month during winter."

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

Figure 5³⁶ - Student working on a railroad.



“We thought it was natural for everybody to do the work of spreading rocks on the railroads. During the summer, we usually picked grass and laid rocks along the railway.”

- Yoon Kang-Sook

“We often went to go help with the railwork after classes. We plucked the grass surrounding the railways, spread rocks around the railways, and carried rocks around the crossties. There was a mining area in my region, so oftentimes

³⁶ Ibid.

Kim Jong-il came to supervise the field himself. We had to organize and clean the railways because of that. We also had to repair the old asphalt roads by filling holes with pebbles and melted oil sediments and stepping on it. On top of that, we had to work in the fields and raise rabbits at our school.”

- **Koo Dong-Su**

Figure 6³⁷ - Small child carrying rocks to the railroads.



³⁷ Ibid.

7.1.2 Construction for Schools

Schools receive no funding from the government to properly operate in North Korea. Thus, construction work required to newly build, maintain, and/or repair the school edifices is often completed by the students. Not only are they mandated to participate in hazardous construction labor, but they are also required to make or bring the materials necessary for the construction at their own expense. For example, one of the defectors reported that his school had every student make brick blocks whenever there was a construction project, which was at least two or three times a month. Another defector shared that the school assigned every student to bring a certain amount of cement, sand, lime powder, etc. for construction projects:

“Construction work was the hardest, even more so than the farm labor. A ‘block’ is a wooden frame that we used to make bricks. To make bricks, we first dug up mud from the ground, blend and knead mud, water, and cut up rice straw, and put the mixture into the block. The preparation took a long time, about 1-2 hours. You can only make 3 at once. One person can make a maximum of 20 bricks per hour. Each grade level was given a day project to make 400-500 bricks. There were 40-50 students per grade

level on average, so each student would technically have to produce approximately 10 bricks normally. However, each student had to make more than 10 due to the high absence rate.³⁸ One time, the school demanded us to make bricks to build a rabbit hutch. To build a rabbit hutch, we first had to dig into the ground. To make the foundation secure, we had to lay the ground with rocks, otherwise, the rabbits would escape by digging a hole, so we went around to gather rocks on numerous occasions. It took a year to complete the rabbit hutch - the entire school met about once a week to work from 2 to 6. Once, the school announced building a swimming pool in its front yard. We had to dig a pit the size of a swimming pool in the front yard with a shovel by ourselves. And then we had to carry rocks one by one and build the pool because we didn't have cement. When we put water into the pool, all of it leaked, so we stopped in the middle of building it. It took about a month.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

³⁸ If one student is absent, the other students have to divide and complete the absent student's work amongst themselves.

“We also participated in construction work, such as restoring the walls around the school, carrying soil/sand/cement, and applying calcium oxide (a chemical applied to buildings for durability, water absorption, and heating). Wealthy parents provided financial support by hiring laborers.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

“We planted trees, grass, and flowers outside the school buildings as a part of the Environmental Construction Campaign. The students were the ones who had to remove the grass from the school fields, although the task was originally delegated to the school administration. We tidied the classrooms; powdered the bottom of the trees, paved blocks, school walls, and classrooms with lime powder; and washed the windows as a part of the Hygienic Culture Campaign.³⁹ We usually did this during spring, and the hands of all the children who worked with the powdered lime were in severely bad shape. The skin peeled

³⁹ “Lime Powder” is a substance used in construction. However, without proper equipment, it can result in severe burns to a person’s skin. It is inappropriate for children to handle the substance.

off and cracked to the extent that it started bleeding. If you pour water over some lime powder, the water starts to boil, but the students kneaded the lime powder without any tools. They also had to obtain all of the equipment necessary for these campaigns by themselves. There was no support from the Party(government).”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

Many schools raise animals, such as rabbits and goats, to help fund their operations. However, the responsibility of building and maintaining rabbit hutches falls solely on the students. The North Korean government’s failure to perform its duties yet again results in the oppression of vulnerable children.

“The school raised rabbits and goats. The rabbit cages were made from mud collected and carried in backpacks from deep in the mountains, water collected from the river, and rocks hand-carried by the students. When building the school, the students had to bring the necessary materials on their own. The students had to go far into the mountains to gather mud. Collecting and carrying the mud from the mountains to school was a very

tiring job for me as a young child. I would travel back and forth three times, and any more after that, my legs were too weak and shaky to move. I had to pack about half of my bag with mud and walk a mountainous road as long as a typical distance between two train stations. My legs shook violently as I walked down the mountain with a heavy load on my back.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

“The students were obligated to raise the school’s rabbits and return them afterwards. During inspections, we gathered and presented more rabbits and grass. We did a lot of work collecting extra grass, only to throw it away once the inspectors were satisfied.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

Lastly, schools assemble students for the construction of private housing for school personnel, usually the principal. Children have no power to refuse or even speak against these extreme cases of exploitation and acquiesce to the school’s demands.

“The students had to help out when building the school principal’s house. The

rabbit cages (they were not small cages but big buildings, as the school raised them in masses), goat cages, and school fences were all built by the students. The students were the ones who built the fences surrounding the whole school, and they were the ones who had to fix it when it was damaged from rain or snow.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

Much like the other kinds of labors imposed on the school children, construction work also inflicts serious injuries because it involves vigorous physical effort and the use of hazardous tools. The government still does not fulfill its promise of “universal free medical service,” and neither medical treatment nor compensation is provided to the injured children.

“One time, my classmate was injured from being struck by the edge of a shovel. He was hit by another student working with a shovel next to him. The school does not, however, look after the injured student or accommodate his or her needs. School officials were perhaps okay with an injured student taking a single day off of school. However, my classmate was injured to the extent that he had to take a whole month off. We

were only 13 or 14 years old then, but this was an everyday event for us. Another time, a different classmate fell from a height of 4 floors while wiping the glass. Gladly, he survived. This was when I was in the first year of middle school.”

- Kim Ki-Hoon

Figure 7⁴⁰ - Students forced to engage in railroad work.



“My hands were bruised and often bleeding from the railroad labors.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

⁴⁰ Russel Myers, “Child chain gangs of North Korea exposed, as kids as young as five forced to repair railways,” *Mirror UK*, 14th December, 2016. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/child-chain-gangs-north-korea-9460513>.

Figure 8⁴¹ - Spreading gravel over the railroads.



⁴¹ Ibid.

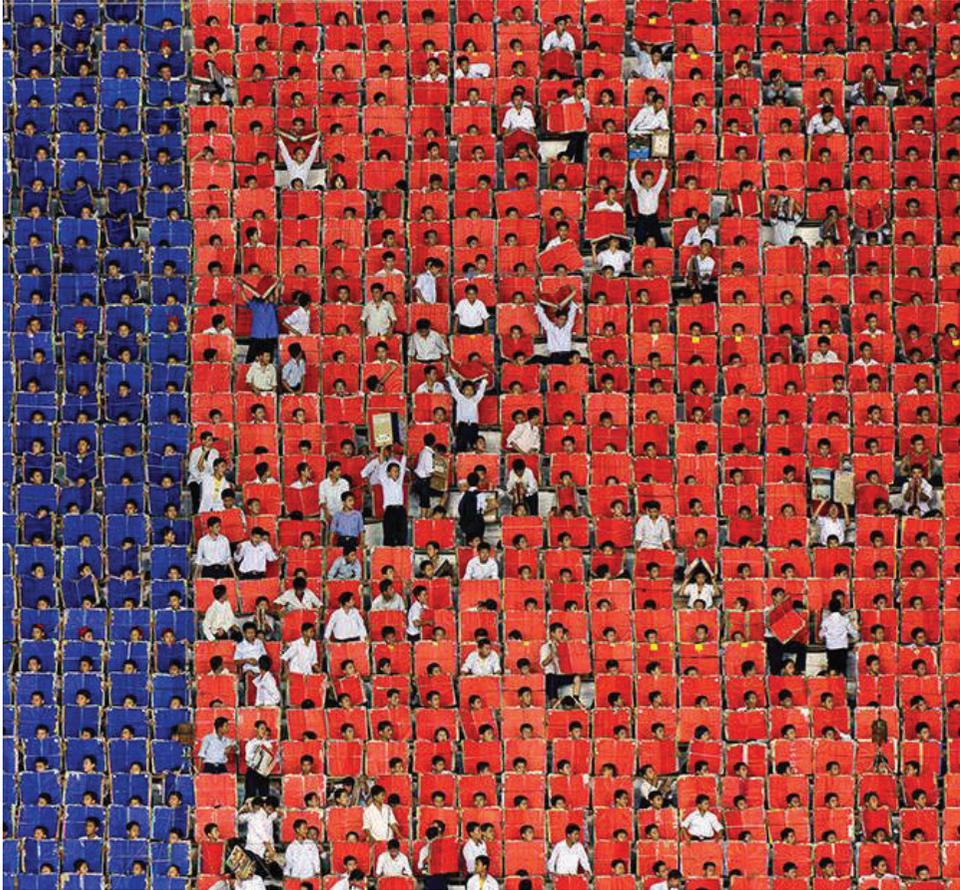
7.2 Mass Games

Mass games, also known as mass gymnastics, are a group gymnastic performance involving a large number of individuals. North Korea is the only country in the world that regularly arranges mass games at the national level. The most renowned North Korean mass games are the Grand Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, widely referred to as the *Arirang* Mass Games or the *Arirang* Festival. It occurs annually in Pyongyang over several months, involving more than 100,000 individuals engaging in elaborate performances and gymnastics celebrating North Korean events such as Kim Il-Sung's birthday. A myriad of children, mostly from Pyongyang, are mobilized for the festival and must practice for months leading up to the day of the event. Although the participation is required by the government, the expenses of traveling and refreshments are borne by children.

One of the main attractions of the festival is the flipcard backdrop, “a giant human mosaic that forms elaborate panoramas of megacities, slogans and cartoons.”⁴² Approximately 50,000 children synchronize flipping a colored card to create an animated backdrop. This staging demands the utmost effort, far too challenging for children.

⁴² Johnathan Watts, “Welcome to the Strangest Show on Earth,” *The Guardian*, 1st October 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/01/northkorea>.

Figure 9⁴³ - Students holding up boards to create the flipcard backdrop.



⁴³ Paul Cockerton, "Great Korea moves: Astonishing photos from secretive North Korea's Mass Games," *Mirror UK*, 29th March 2012. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/north-koreas-mass-games-astonishing-774764>.

“Ordinary students prepared for the Arirang Mass Games (all high school students living in Pyongyang and middle school students in some proceedings). It was toilsome because you had to practice a lot in the summer. There was more practice for this than the torch march or the review of troops.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

Figure 10⁴⁴ - A flipcard backdrop scene from a distance.



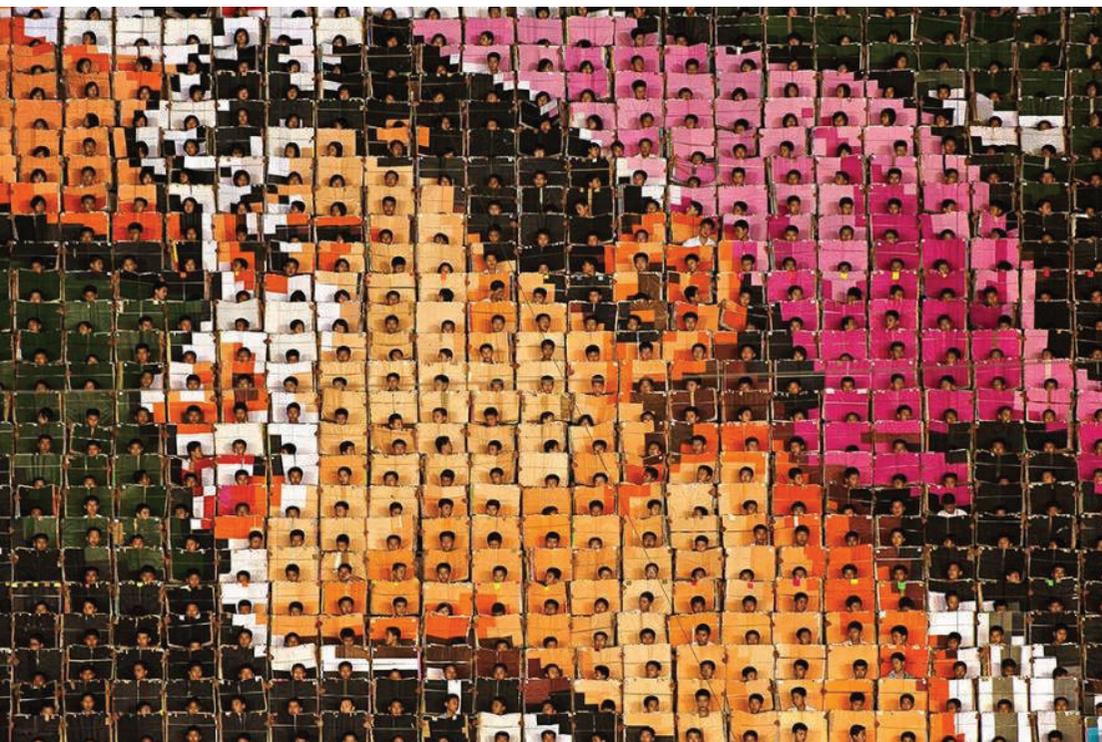
⁴⁴ Werner KrawietzVogel, “A Night in Pyongyang”, 20th September 2015. <http://www.werner-kranwetvogel.de/a-night-in-pyongyang>.

“It is during the times of mass games that I regret being born in Pyongyang. Students are forced to participate starting from their elementary school years. Mass games existed even before the Arirang Mass Games. The flipcard backdrop (human mosaic) was comprised of approximately 50,000 people, and they were in charge of holding colored cards (that collectively make massive background images) and flipping them over according to the conductor. Young students are required to practice this under scorching heatwaves, and some students die from heat strokes. When I was in elementary school, I personally experienced one of my classmates die during practice. Some of my friends would pee urine mixed with blood because they were so exhausted. It was extremely exhausting to practice under the sun for such a long time, especially because we had to practice the same routine in a highly uniform manner. The cheering squad was in charge of clapping and cheering. Their practices were relatively less exhausting than the flipcard team. The guys would practice with clubs while the girls practiced with ribbons. Students born in Pyongyang all basically know how to do rhythmic gymnastics. We finished classes in the morning to work for the Social Agenda. We had to prepare about 6 months for

rhythmic gymnastics; the rehearsals for the Arirang Mass Games, as a whole, takes exactly a year. College students also had to prepare for the formal military inspection for a year.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

Figure 11⁴⁵ - Another example of a flipcard backdrop.



⁴⁵ Werner KrawietzVogel, “Fotoserie über die Massgames in Pjöngjang, Nordkorea”, 25th September 2015
<http://www.werner-kranwetvogel.de/massgames-pyongyang>.

Children in Pyongyang live in a more blessed environment than children in other regions, but the duties imposed on them are also significant. They need to pay more money for various reasons and be mobilized for more events. Mass games are best known for Arirang, but other types of performances are always waiting for them. There are small mass games other than Arirang in other regions.

“We didn’t even attend classes because we were told Kim Jong-Il was coming to our school. We instead practiced for our performances dedicated to his visit. Music students would practice from morning to night (from 8 AM to 10 PM - 12 AM), taking short breaks only for meals. I also practiced running and shouting joyfully, “General!” for the time when Kim Jong-il arrives. We were to pay for every equipment and other necessary expenses (including Korean traditional jackets, instruments, school uniforms, taking turns packing lunch for music and physical education teachers).

There also was a performance performed separately by the younger students, called “Welcoming the New Year Show.”

The students of this performance do not participate in the Arirang Mass Games because its practice was equally time consuming. They practiced for four months instead of taking classes.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

The last Arirang mass games were in 2013. However, PSCORE highlights the *Arirang* for two main reasons. First, these games affected numerous defectors and were only stopped four years ago. Second, there is little reason to trust the North Korean Government that they have permanently ended this form of child labor. It is likely that North Korea has temporarily suspended the games because they are focusing on internal stabilization and nuclear testing, rather than addressing any concerns over the abuse of children's rights. One member of the North Korean elite, who defected, summarized his views:

“It will probably happen again when the opportunity comes. They didn't have the leisure to focus on this because of missile and nuclear developments after 2013, but when they do get the chance, it will start again.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

7.3 Birthdays and Mourning of the Supreme Leaders

7.3.1 Birthdays

The celebration of the birthdays of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un consists of numerous individual performances across the nation (some similar to the *Arirang* Mass Games), ceremonial parades, visits to monuments, songs/choir concerts, etc. As expected, children are summoned for these functions.

“In order to commemorate the birthday of Kim Il-Sung on April 15th, we all gathered in the district’s big plaza and practiced flipcard backdrop for 2 months. It happened in the plaza in front of Kim Jong-Suk Arts Theater in Hyesan. From all over the country, they selected and called in several tall students to Pyongyang, where they had to practice the ceremonial parade (similar to a formal military inspection) for 6 months. They were only in their 2nd and 3rd year of high school. Afterwards, they received a wristwatch inscribed with ‘Kim Il-Sung.’”⁴⁶

- **Kim Sae-Joon**

⁴⁶ Receiving the wristwatch is considered a great honor for the students. If this watch is lost or sold, you could be punished.

“It was difficult with all the events we had to participate in. For the Party Foundation Day (October 10th) and birthdays of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-II, students had to go to a dance. The whole school first gathered around 5 pm, and then we joined other schools and danced for about 2 hours.”

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

“We go early in the morning for the Day of the Sun (April 15th, Kim Il Sung’s birthday) and do flip-card mosaics to display the name of Kim Jong II, like in the Arirang Mass Games. All students must participate. We start practice in the beginning of April and continue until the day of the performance.⁴⁷ The directors would strike the wrists of those who made mistakes with rulers or batons and hurl abuses. They would say, ‘You are not devoting yourself. You are acting up. How can you make mistakes when we are performing for the great leader on the Day of the Sun.’ People who make mistakes are not only given warnings but also

⁴⁷ Big cities and major urban areas can end up practicing for up to a year or more. Rural areas practice for less time.

punishments. They have to hold heavy objects (e.g. heavy art contest books) and listen to the directors say, “the General studied and achieved enlightenment at the age of 12. How come you guys are having it much easier and can’t even do this?” Because we were young, we took in everything they said. We thought the General was a god. We thought, “Wow, he is truly a great man.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

7.3.2 Death and Mourning of Kim Jong-il

After Kim Jong-Il, the leader of North Korea from 1994 to 2011, died on December 17th, 2011, the government ordered a nation-wide surveillance of statues commemorating him. Even though it was the middle of the winter, schools organized students into groups to guard the local statues in shifts, and students stood outside for long periods in sub-freezing temperatures. This season was the middle of the winter, and the students suffered from the cold.

“During the period of mourning for Kim Jong-Il’s death (about 10 days), I had to stand outside, near his statue every night for 5 hours. The school ordered teachers to assign students on-duty hours. It was

to guard the Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-il's statue from people who may try to damage it and to signify condolences. I remember my body freezing because it was in the winter and I lived in an especially cold region. They didn't provide any winter clothes, so we had to bring them ourselves. They didn't provide any food either. Students brought warm water themselves, and some people voluntarily came out to give out warm milk for us."

- **Lee Ji-Eun**

7.4 Propaganda Campaigns and Political Events

"For every special occasion (e.g.. election), students were called to participate in various events."

- **Moon Yoon-Ji**

The North Korean government also regularly assembles children through the school system for political campaigns and events. The most representative propaganda campaign for which students were gathered occurred during the term of South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak (2008-2013). Unlike his predecessors,

President Lee pursued a more aggressive and uncompromising diplomatic attitude toward North Korea. The North Korean regime, at the time under Kim Jong-Il did not welcome the new South Korean approach, and campaigns soon ensued in Pyongyang to express the regime's displeasure with South Korea's new administration and to strengthen unity in the country. At these political events, which were organized on most national holidays and for special, celebratory occasions as well, children were mobilized to march with posters and shout profane slogans for hours.

“Young students are mobilized to participate in political campaigns too. There once was a rally against South Korean Presidencies, specifically for the condemnation of the former president Lee Myung-Bak. We made a huge sculpture of former President Lee with a body of a rat, and chanted ‘Rip him apart.’ Children stood at the very front lines of the rallies on the pretext that ‘Our greatest pride and dignity has been compromised.’ We were to participate without question. These campaigns were held at least once every month, whether it was about a good or bad event. We once participated in campaigns addressing successful missile and nuclear tests. We had to gather for almost all holidays. But because of the

long hours of standing and chanting, many of the children fainted. They couldn't go home and take a rest; they had to come right back out and participate again after receiving an injection."

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

"When Lee Myung-Bak was president in South, the students made dolls of him and hit them while calling out "troll, freak." They did it because it was insulting to his dignity. In the case of Park Geun-hye, she was spoken fondly of at first but later heavily criticized."

- **Park Min-Young**

7.5 Minor Forms of Child Labor

There are significantly less dangerous or abusive types of child labor in North Korea compared to Agricultural Labor Support, item collections, or construction work. Nevertheless, they are burdensome, unnecessary, and interfere with children's education and well-being.

7.5.1 Waving Flowers

Students gather on the streets when high officials, soldiers, or other respectable people serving North Korea pass by, in order to wave flowers and the North Korean flag and to applaud them. Although this is a compulsory activity, the necessary flowers and flags are not provided; students must bear the expenses for these items.

“In elementary, middle, and high school and college, after second period or afternoon classes, when there were “chumhosaeng” [students who just graduated from middle school and enrolled in the army] or people going to work for the country or the city, we would wave the red flag or flowers to cheer them on. I thought it was a typical duty as a North Korean citizen.”

- **Kim Sae-Joon**

“About twice a year, we had to wave flowers on the street when the army or important officials passed by, so we always kept artificial flowers ready at home.”

- **Choi Eun-Young**

7.5.2 Atmosphere Creation Project

Children are also required to walk around the city/town in groups, singing and waving flowers to create a lighter ambience. It is a good example of how trivial the children are in North Korea.

“For the Atmosphere Creation project, we went around the city singing and waving flowers in order to uplift the mood of the city, which didn’t have electricity and was lifeless and gloomy. This was mandatory, and we went out almost every day during the semester (not during breaks). It was for 30 minutes before classes started; we left at 7:30 and got to school around 8. I was infuriated - it was hot in the summer and freezing in the winter.”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

7.5.3 Performances for Soldiers

Children who specialize in the arts and physical education must visit military camps and perform for the soldiers to their boost the morale. In lieu of the after-school Agricultural Labor Support, these students must participate in rigorous practices for weeks leading up to the performances.

“We would visit military camps and hold ‘Consolation Shows’. We held these morale-boosting performances every year. The arts and entertainment students had to regularly perform the Consolation Shows held every Victory Day (July 27th) starting from their elementary school years. The performances are very tiring because every aspect of the it (singing style, scenario [of plays and skits], lyrics, and dance) is to be done exactly as prescribed. We practice for about a month.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

8

Acceptance and Desensitization of Child Labor in North Korea

“The adults didn’t really care much. It [providing for the People’s Army through harsh labor such as item collections or the Agricultural Labor Support] was something that everybody had to do from youth to adulthood, and until death [...]. Some adults gave us scraps of iron if they had some to spare.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

North Korea is a society that has become desensitized to exploitative labor practices. The instances of child labor described in this report have been taking place for decades. At the time of writing, the demands of the Agricultural Labor Support and the Children's Initiative are still a reality for North Korean schoolchildren.

Having lived under this system for decades, school administrations, teachers, parents, and even students have become accepting of this labor, despite its exploitative nature. The following testimonies from North Korean defectors, in this next section, will demonstrate the extent to which society has become used to practices that exploit children as an integral part of life.

8.1 The Views of Teachers

While teachers do receive a salary, it is a small amount that cannot support a teacher's living expenses. Worse, they do not receive their wages immediately, and usually have to bribe officials to gain access to their salary, reducing what small amount they had. From the point of view of teachers, their unmet needs lead to the necessary exploitation of children under their care.

“Some of the nicer, elder teachers would say, ‘If I had the money, I would pay for everything.’ The teachers do not receive

any salary. I can't say that they do. Not from the government, at any rate.⁴⁸ Because of this, students suffer. Everybody suffers. The teachers can't talk freely about this either. When they ask for some help, they feel really bad and ashamed. Even when I was a student, I felt really bad for my teachers.

There are no means in place for the protection of children's basic rights. When I was a student, we thought that the teachers simply asked us to do things because we are capable, and we carried out our assigned tasks. You can realize that North Korean children are being exploited only when you come here [to South Korea].

90% of teachers think that it is normal to assign such harsh labor to students. The other 10% feel pity for the children. They would think 'When I was young, the workload and hunger was not as bad as today'.

Overall, the teachers take the status quo for granted. They don't think, 'is it right

⁴⁸ As noted, in reality, teachers do receive a salary. However, it is not a living wage that teachers can rely upon.

that we make these young children do such work?”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

“We were disgusted by some students whose parents, though financially well-off, did not give money to the teachers. We thought, ‘I don’t even earn money for coming out and teaching the students, and you say you don’t have money to spare me?’ When the teachers were mean to the children, the students would go back home, tell their parents, and bring some money to the teachers.

The students thought it was only natural for them to give money to the teachers. The teachers thought so too. But now that I have come to South Korea, I feel that I deserve to be imprisoned a 100 times for doing such things. The children in North Korea are so pitiful.”

- **Kim Eun-Hee**

As these two former teachers shared, most of their colleagues do not realize that the harsh work and additional item collections they demanded of their students are exploitative practices, until they defect and see a different reality outside of North Korea.

North Korean teachers' salary is not enough to meet their basic needs. In order to survive, they assign certain tasks to their students, or ask for items outside of government-run and school-run item collections. It should not be forgotten that this social structure is the core of the problem and teachers are victims too.

*"A teacher's salary was 3,000-4,000 KPW per month."*⁴⁹

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

8.2 The Views of Parents

Parents naturally dislike the item collections assigned to their children because having to purchase inaccessible items, like rabbit hide, is a financial burden. Nevertheless, they cooperate in the assigned tasks because they empathize with their children, and are accustomed to these assignments. Having been through the same situation as students themselves, they know firsthand the harsh punishments their children will have to face, should the assignment not be completed. As the testimonies below illustrate, for parents, item collections and Agricultural Labor Support are, burdensome, but unavoidable realities that their children have to go through, as they did when they were students.

⁴⁹ 1 kg of rice costs approximately 4,500 KPW. In the testimonies of this report, teacher salary and rice prices vary depending on the testimonial situation, year, and region

“The parents definitely hated this system. They found it frustrating but it couldn’t be avoided because it is the societal norm.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“I never thought that item collection was unfair or wrong. Neither did my parents. It’s something we are all used to.”

- **Yang Soon-Yi**

“Worried that their children would be ostracized by their peers after not completing an assignment, the parents would give all that they could for item collections.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“Teachers require additional financial support from parents. The students and their parents all understand this as natural to any human relationship. For them, this is something that cannot be helped, because the teachers do not receive enough salary.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

8.3 The Views of Students

When first asked about their opinion on the item collections as students, defectors uniformly answered that they found nothing wrong with them, though they were never enthusiastic about their tasks. They were given these assignments in school as long as they could remember, and before they themselves reached school age, they grew up seeing their family members and neighbors scrapping for various items.

To North Korean children, item collections and harsh agricultural labor are a reality of life that no one questions. Even when it comes to item collections or work organized by their homeroom teachers for their own purposes, children believe that as students, it is their duty to comply. The few who, at some point, question the legitimacy of the assigned tasks dare not speak about them for fear of being punished.

“Our rationale was simple: ‘because I was born with these circumstances, it’s natural that I work.’ Thus we passively accepted our reality without any resistance.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“In elementary, middle, and high school, I thought they [item collections and the Agricultural Labor Support] were normal

school activities. However, looking back, I'm shocked to realize that the schools operated, not with government's support, but with the children's money."

- **Park Chang-Shik**

"I wasn't angry about the Agricultural Labor Support. There were times when I didn't want to work starting in high school, but before then, I thought of it as an ordinary, typical routine."

- **Park Jong-Gu**

"I wondered why my country was in such a poor state. Why did they need to use students to move sand or manure; why did we do everything manually; why didn't we have machines? I saw on TV that they used tractors to move heavy things around but why did we have to carry everything?"

- **Park Jong-Woo**

"We wouldn't dare talk back or even think about it. If the principal told you what to

do, you did it, especially if it was the highest official at the school. If you did talk back, you would be faced with the most severe punishment. You wouldn't dare talk back."

- Yoon Kang-Sook

"North Koreans believe that a child grows and acquires discipline by working. No one realizes that children need protection. The children think: 'I need to do this work well in order to become an adult' or 'this is a mountain I need to climb in order to grow and be disciplined' or 'I need to do this in order to become a more respectable person.' For the children, this is something they must do to be ready physically, and live well in society. And this is everyone's attitude.

Even parents believe that their children need to complete their assigned tasks well in order to receive approval. It was a kind of pride for parents to see their child work diligently. Many young people die within 10 years of their military service, so

parents train their children to be ready physically.

They think that they are in control of their own fate and this [harsh labor] is a process they must go through in order to grow. But they do so much work that their own individual development is impeded. The children here [in South Korea] look so happy. As a parent, I would want my child to grow up happy, like the children are here.”

- **Kim Ki-Hoon**

Part Three

“When I was living in the kwan-li-so, I didn’t know that eating three meals a day was normal. A month’s ration did not last us for more than 2 weeks, and I was always hungry.”

Han Chul-Min

“We were dirty and basically treated like prisoners. We were shameful to look at, barely clothed and dirty. People from outside the relief shelters thought we looked like prisoners.”

Jo Dong-ik

“Working was tough but feeling hungry was tougher. There was not enough food to give us enough energy to do the work they wanted us to do.”

Jo Dong-ik

Child Labor outside the Education System



9

Prison Camps

9.1 Background

North Korea differentiates their prisons according to the crime convicted. Those who are accused of ideological insubordination are sent to a *kwan-li-so*, which is a concentration camp mostly for those accused of political crimes. Anyone who enters becomes a member of the hostile class in North Korea's *songbun* caste system, and whatever rights they had prior to entering are completely stripped away.

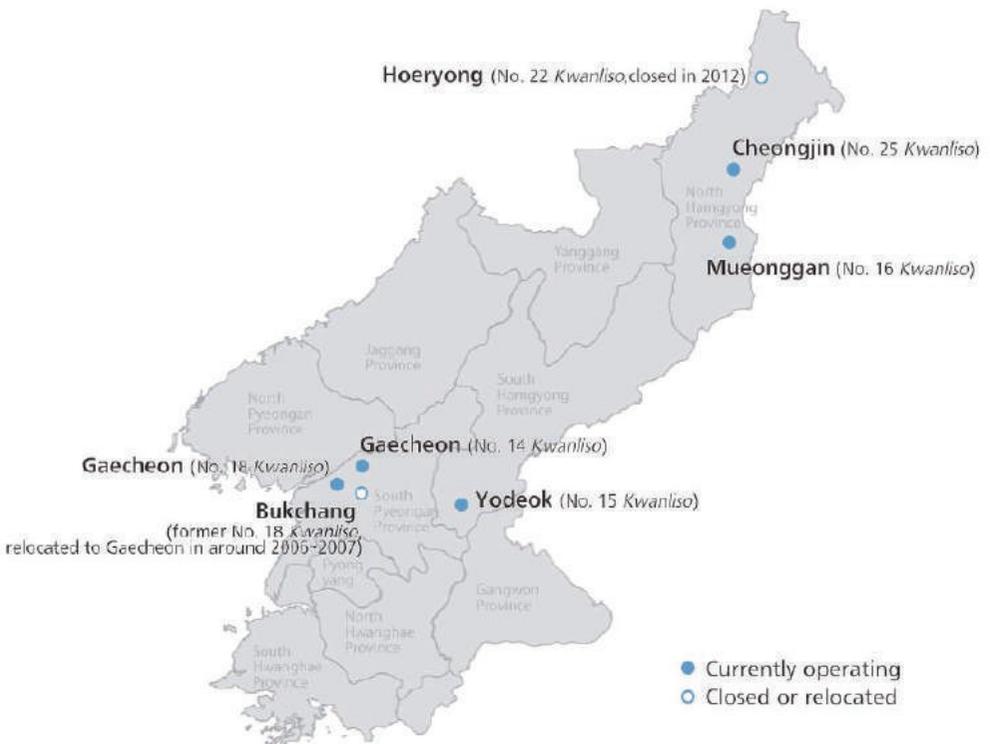
The North Korean government firmly denies the existence of such places. However, defector testimonies and satellite images indicate otherwise. In a sense, the government's denial could be interpreted as an acknowledgment that the atrocities related in the following section are unacceptable practices that should not to take place on North Korean soil.

Up to 120,000 people live in each of these camps, but most do not know why they are imprisoned.⁵⁰ One defector, Han Chul-Min, grew up in a *kwan-li-so* without knowing the reason for his custody. It was only 22 years later, when he got married, that he learned of his offense: he was the son of a South Korean national; his father had been brought to North Korea as a prisoner of war.

⁵⁰ Lee Jin-Seo. *North Korean Prison Camps*. Radio Free Asia Korean Service: 2016, 13.

Any relation or contact with the South, or criticizing the North Korean regime, warrants an individual’s arrest. However, the punishment does not stop with one individual. His/her family is also detained on a guilt-by-association basis for up to three generations.

Figure 12⁵¹ - Map of North Korea, with known *kwan-li-so* locations and operating status.



⁵¹ “White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2017,” *KINU: Korea Institute for National Unification*, p. 448.

There are five known camps, as shown in Figure 12. They are “villages” enclosed by electric fences and barbed wire. Each *kwan-li-so* operates independently and is classified according to the level of treason. While these differences exist, the testimonies of former inmates are similar with regards to the conditions of living and the torment they endured.

The following section of PSCORE’s report is based on interviews with defectors who have escaped from Camp 18. There has been speculation about the operating status of Camp 18, which should be clarified. Camp 18 was in Bukchang, originally located in Sepodong, Sampo-dong, and Sinheung-li. It was then allegedly closed in 2006. Initially, it could not be confirmed whether Camp 18 has been merged with the neighboring Camp 14, relocated to a different area, or reopened after a hiatus under a new name and administrative classification. Preliminary research suggested that it merged or was reopened within the Kim Jong-un era.⁵² Unfortunately, direct confirmation on these prison camps’ status is nearly impossible to gain, due to only a handful of survivors able to escape from,

⁵² “*Has Camp 18 been re-opened or merged with Camp 14?*” *North Korean Economy Watch: News and Analysis of the North Korean Economy*, March 30th 2016, <http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2016/09/30/has-camp-18-been-reopened-or-merged-with-camp-14/>.; “Camp 14 and 18, North Korea: Satellite Imagery and Witness Accounts,” *One Free Korea*, <http://freekorea.us/camps/14-18/#sthash.DcSaDpif.dpbs>.

and confirm the whereabouts, of these prison camps. Nevertheless, recent reports have confirmed that while the size of Camp 18 has been downsized, it is still operational. Rather than being closed down, it was relocated to Dongrim-li, Gaecheon, South Pyeongan Province.⁵³

However, these changes to the location and size of Camp 18 do not invalidate the testimonies of survivors having been imprisoned in the former Camp 18. Moreover, regardless of changes to Camp 18, other such camps exist, and the survivors of Camp 18 provide a crucial insight into how the North Korean government deals with child labor within the political prison system. Ultimately, they reveal that the prisoners are subjected to daily labor and inhumane treatment in the *kwan-li-so*, regardless of age.

The youth are treated with particular cruelty, but those who manage the camp keep them short of dying, knowing that they are indispensable as the next generation of laborers:

“The purpose of the concentration camps was not just to revolutionize⁵⁴ people but also to produce laborers. The State simply needed slaves to do manual labor.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

⁵³ “White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea,” *KINU: Korea Institute for National Unification*, 447.

⁵⁴ Intense labor, a form of punishment.

For this reason, children are brought into the *kwan-li-so* through guilt-by-association, or they are born there through marriages within the prison camp. Camp 15 is an exception as it has stopped accepting children after *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, an autobiography of a former prisoner's life in Camp 15, received international attention and North Korea was heavily criticized. According to the testimony of another survivor of the Camp 15, it is not known where and how the children have been sent since the book became internationally famous. Only recently, has it become known that children are not detained in Yoduk camps any more, but it is not known where children will be held if their parents are brought to the camp.

The other *kwan-li-so*, seemingly still detains children who are told to assume responsibility for the alleged crimes of their parents and grandparents. As such, they learn to direct their anger and blame their misfortune on their parents, not on the system that takes advantage of their free labor.

"I used to think, 'We live like this because we met the wrong parents.'"

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

9.2 Education

Despite being a prison camp, the *kwan-li-so* houses thousands of individuals, and are large enough to almost be akin to a village-detention area. Each *kwan-li-so* is large enough to have several schools. However, the quality of the education given in *kwan-li-so* schools is far worse than in the schools in normal society. In the standard school system, a student graduates after three years of middle school and three years of high school. The camp only offers schooling through middle school. As soon as children have a rudimentary education, they are deemed ready and immediately sent to a workplace.

“When children turn thirteen or fourteen-years-old, they become laborers in coal mines. I myself started laboring at a coal mine when I was thirteen-years-old. I recognized the difference in education because I had received some education outside the camp. On the other hand, my siblings who were born in the camp, grew up only knowing the school system inside there.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

Classes are conducted, not by trained teachers, but by prison guards. The textbooks are old, worn, and tattered after having been reused every year. Weekends do not exist in a *kwan-li-so*.

“Holidays didn’t make a difference, because we still worked on New Year’s and national holidays. It showed loyalty. We worked on Sundays too, even though the teacher was able to take the day off. He put some children in charge instead. I have never seen my parents free from work and idly staying in the house.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

“There is no weekend in Kwan-li-so. I first learned the word ‘weekend’ when I came to South Korea.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

In a *kwan-li-so* school, the children only learn basic Korean and arithmetic. They are allowed to take subjects on the policies of the Labor Party as elective classes; learning a foreign language is not possible. It is mandatory for them to celebrate political holidays, such as Kim Il-sung’s birthday, Kim Jong-il’s birthday, Foundation Day of the Worker’s Party of Korea, Foundation of the DPRK, etc. Furthermore, there are more ideological practices to solidify the children’s loyalties to the State.

For instance, there is weekly *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa*, and every year, the children are forced to recite the Dear Leader’s New Year’s address repeatedly until they

have it memorized.

“In North Korea, the New Year’s Address is a highly significant speech. It is like a road map that lays out the important policies and goals for the new year. The citizens are not very interested in it (because it has nothing to do with their personal lives) but at general meetings or in class, we are organized to memorize and present it. It’s a great amount of stress.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

The purpose of these routines is to instill in the children a dedication to the Kim regime that persists into adulthood. The effect of such practices on a child stifles creativity and cuts personal growth short. When Kim Hye-Sook was asked if she had any dreams when she was young and in Camp 18, she replied:

“What dreams? How could I dream? We knew that as soon as we graduated from school, we would be sent to the coal mines.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

9.3 Food

There is barely enough food distributed in the *kwan-li-so*. As children, the defectors were always hungry and constantly on the search for food to fill their empty stomachs. They needed to first and foremost relieve their hunger because a family's standard ration is 1.8 kg of corn a month. This is barely enough to feed 2 people.

“When I was living in the kwan-li-so, I didn't know that eating three meals a day was normal. A month's ration did not last us for more than 2 weeks, and I was always hungry.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

In order to supplement their diet, children become experts at catching wild animals. This includes snakes, birds, and rats. Otherwise, they have no other source of meat:

“If I saw a snake, it was my lucky day. I would grab it with my hands. I didn't care if it was poisonous. I'd cut off its head, roast it over a fire, and eat it. There wasn't anything we didn't catch to eat.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

But food was still scarce. The prisoners suffer from poor nutrition, sanitation, and healthcare to the point that disease and distress are widespread. For example, pellagra is a disease that plagues the prisoners, particularly the ones who first enter the camp and are not used to its harsh conditions. It is caused by vitamin deficiency and malnourishment. Parts of the skin peel off, sores appear around the mouth, making it difficult for the diseased person to eat.

Other situations escalate to the point where starvation drives some women to commit acts that would shock the human conscience:

“A 16-year-old boy was so hungry that he ate all the month’s rations. His mother was so angry that she struck an ax through his head and killed him. She chopped his body up and tried to sell it as pork. But she was caught and shot to death. The guards, did not want to dirty their hands, so they told me to open the plastic bag that the child’s body was in; I saw his eyeballs hanging out of their sockets.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

9.4 Labor

Despite their state of starvation, the children are made to spend most of their waking moments working. In particular, the schools mobilize the children and give them quotas to meet. Like the schoolchildren outside the *kwan-li-so*, the ones inside are required to collect scrap items: wastepaper, metal, aluminum, rubber, rabbit hides, and glass bottles. However, the amount the *kwan-li-so* children have to collect is considerably greater because the authorities are allowed to be especially harsh on these so-called prisoners.

No one is able to meet the required amount but the ingenuity of the children to make ends meet is remarkable. The ways they went about collecting the limited items is depicted in Table 5. As Kim Hye-Sook puts it,

“There are smart kids in the kwan-li-so too. I wished they could study to their heart’s content, but they’re forced to work at such a young age that they don’t even grow properly.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

If their living conditions could be improved, even marginally, these children would be able to put their intelligence to better use.

Table 5 - List of required items the schoolchildren had to collect, and how they collected those items

Required Item	How to collect
Wastepaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Take a corn stalk, break in half, dry it, pull out the center, and roll it. · This would be acceptable and pass as raw paper material. · No matter how late the children returned home from work, this was something always prepared ahead of time.
Scrap Metal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Steal from farming tool repair stations or take chain links from unused coal wagons in coal mines and mine rails. · Wherever there were machines, there were also children.
Scrap Rubber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rip the rubber off shoes and take items from the people, who were recently brought in and did not know better to keep their possession safe.
Rabbit Hides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Raise rabbits inside the home because if they are left outside, they will be stolen. · Could also be ordered to bring for dog hide and pig hide to make goods for the People's Army.

In addition to item collection, these children are required to complete a quota of manual labor. The work is done in groups but the ones who finish first would rest on the side, while waiting for the others. Only once everyone is done are they allowed to go home.

The children are given different tasks based on the season. In the spring, the children need to pick at least 4-5 kg worth of edible roots and plants every day. Afterwards, they proceed to their assigned posts for road reconstruction.

“In middle school, we were forced to smooth out dirt roads. Each class from each school was responsible for a portion and each student was assigned a 4-5m long section of the road to maintain.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

Summer is mostly a time to do farm work. The children are forced to make manure and plant as many seedlings, berries, and corn as possible.

In the fall, the students had to collect acorns. While it sounds like a simple task, it requires children to work in extremely dangerous conditions, since acorn trees grow better deep in the mountains.

“At the grocery factory within the prison

camp, they made such things as acorn liquor, acorn soybean paste, acorn soy sauce, and acorn jelly. They made the children work to save this raw material, which was probably enough to the factory to operate for a whole year

There were six middle schools within the camp. Every middle school student went out to get acorn.

When I was 14-15 year old, my classmates and I were told to collect 20 kg of acorns in the mountains every day. We lost several classmates from fatal falls or other accidents. I'm sure it was the same in other schools. A lot of children died, but no one cared."

- Han Chul-Min

In the winter, work is more demanding and the frigid weather makes matters worse. The children are not given any shoes so they wrap rags or plastic around their feet and are injured by frostbite. Scantily clothed from top to bottom, they are forced to shovel snow along the railroads, to prepare the way for the coal trains.

They are also sent to collect wood for coal mines timber posts. The posts measure longer than 120 cm

and wider than 20 cm, so finding anything that size was difficult. Other odd jobs consisted of sorting through dirt to pick out splint coal. Alternatively, they are set as lookout guards along the Taedong River to make sure no one crosses it.

“There was a period when many families, were purged at once from the party and imprisoned in the kwan-li-so. Some children, who were too spoiled when they lived outside, couldn’t handle the environment. One of the middle schoolers ended her life in the river. The next day, children lined up to go into the water. Ever since then, in the kwan-li-so, they would keep 1 km between us and the river, to make sure that no one else tried to commit suicide. In general, there is no word for ‘suicide’ in North Korea because we’re not allowed to harbor such thoughts.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

Apart from the seasonal work, some tasks are done all year round: item collections with excessively high quotas, sports field maintenance, and weeding. The children could also be assigned additional tasks if the adults need extra help. There was, for instance, a time when they were told to carry soil from where it was dug to where the adults were filtering it in search for precious

stones and minerals. They would also work in coal mines, picking up the coal pieces that the adults dug up, putting them in carts, and pushing them up to the surface. So far, no technology has been brought in to make the work safer or easier.

If there was no work to do, the teachers would come up with tasks on the spot to keep the children busy.

“They divided up the class into two groups: one group to dig holes and the other to fill the holes. Or if it rained, they would make the children run laps for two hours in the field.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

Although the children do as much work as the adults, they are given less to eat because they are smaller. This disregards the fact that the children are growing and need as much, if not more, nourishment. It was only when Kim Hye-Sook had children of her own, that she realized how pitiful and unnecessarily difficult childhood was in the *kwan-li-so*:

“I wish they weren’t forced to work. My heart breaks when I see them laboring. I didn’t realize it when I was a child but when I became a parent, I realized how pitiful it was. Similarly, my children don’t

know any better and are forced to work their little hands off.”

- **Kim Hye-Sook**

Kim Hye-Sook was separated from her children when she escaped North Korea. To this day, she does not know to which *kwan-li-so* they were taken away to or if they are even still alive.

9.5 Punishments

The children are constantly left at the mercy of their teacher, who gives instructions concerning the month's item collection quotas and punishes the students if the quota is not met. If the students are unable to collect enough items, the teacher orders the accused student to kneel and proceed to step on them.

The teacher also is at liberty to use his pointer (usually a wooden stick) to hit the students; if it breaks while someone is being punished, that student is asked to bring a new one. Sometimes, without any reason, if he is having a bad day, the teacher takes it out on the kids and beats them over small mistakes.

“When I was in middle school, there was a time I did not listen to my teacher. And I was hit on the back of my head so hard

that I fell over on my knees and hit my nose and lips, which started bleeding.

However, most times, the teacher is not the one disciplining the student. The responsibility is instead passed on to a subordinate, the class chairperson (student). Generally, the teacher beats the chairperson and makes him beat the other children. The chairperson will make the children run twenty rounds of the playground and then hit them with a club. Resisting the chairperson was equivalent to resisting the teacher, so it was impossible. Because I was a male, I was often beaten during my childhood in the kwan-li-so. I have more memories of being punished by my classmates than the teacher.

I would skip class often. The teacher would tell the Class Administrative Vice Chairperson, 'Hey! Go find [Han Chul-Min] and teach him a lesson to remind him to come to school tomorrow.' They were allowed to do whatever it took, even if that included violence, until I followed directions. There was a time when the kids, caught me, opened my mouth wide and poured salt in. I passed out and spent

three days in the hospital.”

- **Han Chul-Min**

The children spend the majority, if not all, of their lives confined within electric fences and are taught to believe that this is as good as it will be. Though guiltless of any crime, they are forced to endure penal servitude in the *kwan-li-so*.

The cruel treatment and excessive labor are close to slavery and the prisoners are treated like animals. Many fundamental human rights are violated but these acts are justified as being merely punitive.

10

Orphanages and Relief Shelters

According to the North Korean Law for the Protection of Children’s Rights, “children who cannot be cared for by parents or guardians shall be raised, at a cost paid for by the State, at Yukawon, Aeyukwon, and other institutes” (Article 31).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Yukawon: Child caring institutions, specifically, educational institutions for pre-school children.

Based on our findings, however, the children in these institutions are subject to various labor costs beyond residence. Because there are so many children in need, there are “relief shelters” (*gu-ho-so*) in addition to conventional orphanages. Table 6 briefly lists the similarities and differences:

Table 6 - Summary of the similarities and differences between orphanages and relief shelters.

	Orphanage	Relief Shelter
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 3 in North Hamgyong Province (each province differs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1 every district
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 200-450 children · Lost both parents · Left behind when parent remarried · Unable to be raised because sole guardian was sent to <i>kwan-li-so</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 20-100 children · <i>Kkotjebi</i> (homeless young beggars) · Abandoned by family because of financial instability · Captured and returned from China

Aeyukowon: Orphanages, specifically, state-run childcare institutions for children without a guardian.

“Korean-English Glossary of North Korean Human Rights Terms,” *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*, (2016).

	Orphanage	Relief Shelter
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 70+ staff · Class monitors from each class, and above them 1 representative class president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 10 security guards · 1 class president to watch children
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · “It’s like a school or army” · Couple hours of class · Wore uniforms and neckties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · “It was like a prison or labor camp” · No education, but daily ideology class · Shoes and nice clothing were taken away · At the beginning of the admission, the shoes are taken away so that they cannot escape.
Food	(Applicable to Both)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The quality of food at orphanage is better. · Three meals were given but it was never enough (approximately 1/3 of a rice bowl) so the children resorted to stealing. · Caught and ate frogs, snakes, birds, rats, and everything they can. · Given corn stalk meal, ground up rice plant root, porridge from noodles, corn rice, etc 	
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Orphanage facilities are relatively better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The whole facility is poor.

	Orphanage	Relief Shelter
Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Work on mountains allocated to the orphanage or nearby farms · Made bricks · Took care of teacher's personal fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Worked from sunrise to sunset · Transported miscellaneous items (cabbage roots, dirt, rocks, etc.)
(Applicable to Both)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Went to collect firewood in faraway mountains · Farming (pulling weeds, sowing seeds, etc.) 		

Neither an orphanage nor relief shelter is an acceptable environment that is conducive to a healthy childhood, especially when forced labor is detrimental to the children's physical and mental wellbeing.

10.1 Background on Orphanages

“Every time I would pass by the orphanage, I’d be reminded of a school. Their sports field was big and clean too.”

- *Jo Dong-ik*

The children who live in an orphanage are forced to live a regimented, military-like lifestyle and are constantly subjected to the whims of their supervisors, the Youth League Director, and other children.

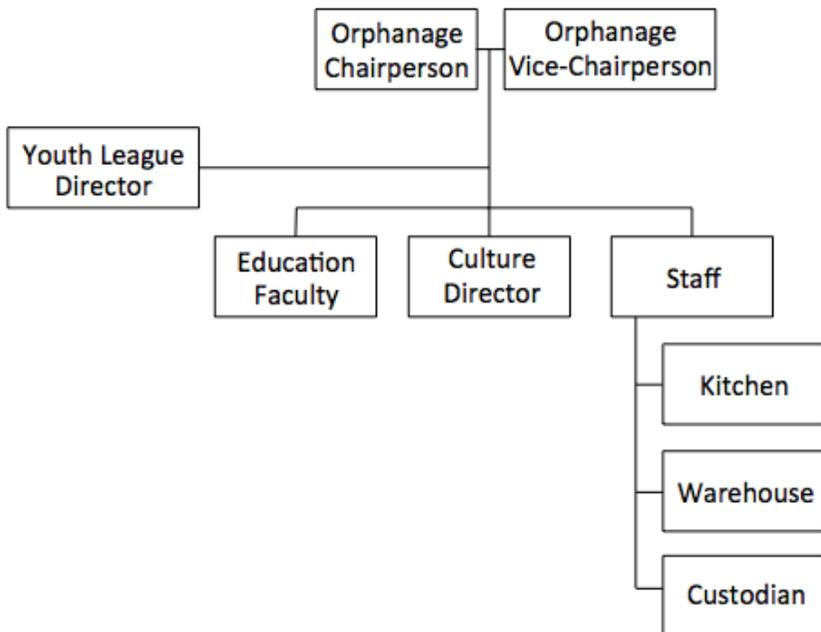
There are approximately 200-450 children living in an orphanage. The numbers vary widely at any given time, depending on the state of the economy and how many children are accepted. More children are turned away from orphanages, since, to be accepted, they must be “qualified” and come from certain backgrounds. From the resources gathered, PSCORE has found three common instances in which children are taken in by the orphanage: those orphaned after both their birth parents died; those abandoned if a parent thought a child from an old marriage would create tensions in the remarriage; and those whose only guardian was imprisoned in a *kwan-li-so* (the guardian is unable to look after a child and do prison work). In any other situation, the children are most likely turned away or sent to a relief shelter.

“I wanted to go to an orphanage. But I could not. There were a lot of orphans around, but I never saw anyone who went to the orphanage. The orphanage had a difficult process.”

- **Jo Dong-ik**

The children live under the direction of approximately 70 employees. Figure 13 outlines the hierarchy of the staff:

Figure 13 - Hierarchy of staff members in an orphanage



“There were times when so many children died that there were more adults than children living in the orphanage. During the Arduous March, at least 10 kids died every day.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Children, as young as four years old, live in the orphanages and are able to graduate when they turn seventeen. However, most children choose to run away before graduating because of the shortage of food and the conditions of the orphanage.

“When the UN came to take pictures how we lived, they took pictures of the better-looking children, who were still bone-skinny. Because it gets worse after that, you start to bloat and then die.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Those who remain, and remain alive, spend their day-to-day lives in the classroom or in the fields, barely surviving.

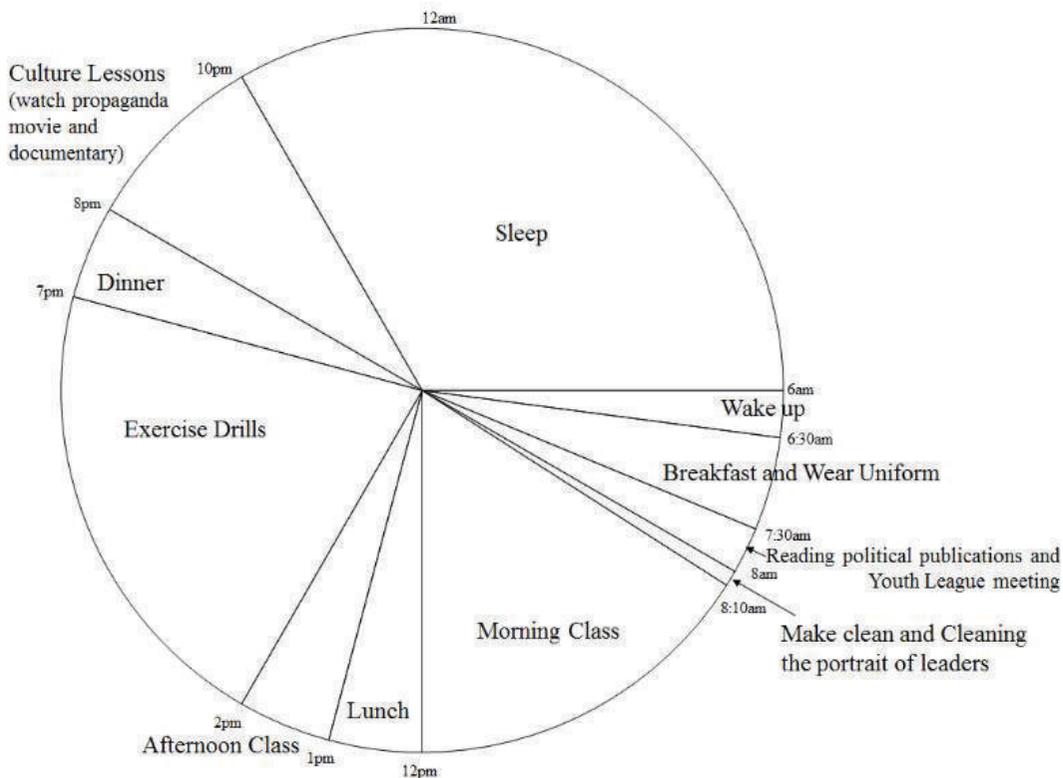
10.2 Orphanage Education and Punishment

The children in an orphanage are given school uniforms and wear neckties. An ideal day at an orphanage would follow the schedule shown in Figure 14. But they rarely followed this schedule:

“Our work would always interrupt it.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Figure 14 - Time schedule of an ideal day at an orphanage.



They have several hours of class every day and were taught:

*“Do not say bad things, just eat what you are given at school and live uprightly.’
However, almost all the children who lived like this died. Those who stole something and ate survived.”*

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Even so, the children that did manage to steal were so malnourished that if they were struck, they would be knocked back 2-3 meters, as Park Kyung-ho recalls. The children are hit badly and regularly. The teachers hit them for not paying attention in class, and the kitchen staff hit them for stealing food. But most times, the children are beaten for no particular reason.

The adults receive no retribution for this. The teachers are able to write off that the children had died in the hospital even if they had in reality, been beaten to death.

10.3 Background on Relief Shelters (*gu-ho-so*)

The orphanage, while a difficult place to live, at least provides some education and is comparably less abusive than a relief shelter. Relief shelters are makeshift orphanages, with significantly less resources. The majority of the children who live here are *kkotjebi*, who are homeless youth found begging on the streets; children abandoned by their parents, who could not afford to feed another mouth; or children too young to go to prison after being caught and brought back from China. The *kkotjebi* are often captured off the streets and forced to live in a relief shelter.

The government claims these establishments are meant to protect and manage homeless children. The living conditions in a relief shelter, however, are no better than a detention facility:

“[The relief shelter] is a place of mass captivity. Just the name of the place is a ‘relief shelter’. Everyone thinks of it as a prison, and nobody wants to go to the shelter where communal living and strict regulations are enforced.”

- **Jo Dong-ik**

Approximately 10 supervisors oversee roughly

200 children in each relief shelter, but instead of managing the them, sought to rather create and control a middle class.

“There were adults to manage, but not with us every day. They let some older boys manage the children. Most of these boys were between the ages of 18 and 22 and were not the criminals, but kkotjebi. These boys had no intention of escaping because they were able to eat well while controlling children.”

- **Jo Dong-ik**

They make the children run outside barefoot, because they thought the children would run away if they had shoes. Much like an orphanage, life outside as a *kkotjebi* on the streets was more desirable than life inside the relief shelter, where the children are kept against their will.

“I was watched even when I went to the bathroom. They were afraid I could run away so they did not give me my shoes when I went out for the first week.

There are a lot of children in the relief shelter, so they steal food from each other and harass one another. It's better to live outside as a kkotjebi. Most of the

children were not stay in the relief shelter for a long time. All of us wanted to run away unconditionally”

- **Jo Dong-Ik**

10.4 Relief Shelter Education and Punishment

“They never made us study.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

“I first went to school when I was 10 [after I left the relief shelter]. I was older than all the other children in my class because I didn’t receive any schooling when I was younger and living there.”

- **Ahn Ji-Young**

There is no academic teaching in a relief shelter and the facilities are run-down. Though the children in relief shelters do not know how to read well or do basic mathematics, they can be taught the North Korean political ideology; however, the amount of ideology taught is dependent on the individual shelter and location. Some relief shelters do not give children any form of education at all. Others believe that they still need to learn ideological principles. These children, in ideology classes, are coerced into offering their devotion to the Party:

“We had nightly ‘chong-hwa’ and the teacher would make each child stand and sing praise songs of the Kim family. They had this bias that the relief shelter children had poor ideological knowledge, so most of this time was spent learning and memorizing ideological texts. If we didn’t do well, we’d be hit and punished. So we tried even harder to do well.”

- **Jo Dong-Ik**

Instead of being helped to cultivate their personal capabilities, the children are raised to be mindless workers. They are humiliated and ordered to do useless tasks; the authority figures would make the children run outside barefoot thinking the children would run away if they had shoes. And if they had been wearing nice clothes when they entered the relief shelter, they would be taken away and most likely sold. And with these children only wearing old and dirty clothes, average North Korean people thought badly of the children in relief shelters:

“We were dirty and basically treated like prisoners. We were shameful to look at, barely clothed and dirty. People from outside the relief shelters thought we looked like prisoners.”

- **Jo Dong-Ik**

As a result, these children are not allowed to attend political celebrations but are nonetheless forced to memorize and worship the North Korean regime's ideologies.

It is common for the children to be excessively abused as well in the relief shelter:

“The worker would hit us the most. He’d hit me with a wooden stick, and anything else that he got his hands on, like firewood, laundry paddles, books, shoes, etc. But he’d never use his hands because that would hurt him as much as it would hurt me. If we were just a little noisy, he would hit us because we were too noisy. If I fell down while he was hitting me, it didn’t make a difference. He would keep hitting me until he was satisfied. And there wasn’t anyone to stop him.

He even put out his cigarette on me. The first time, he flicked some cigarette ash in my mouth and told me to eat it. He put it out on my hip; I still have the scar there. The second time, he put it out on my tongue. There was no specific reason. I think he enjoyed my pain because he snickered as he was doing it.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

“Beating my head and kicking me with their feet was what they did all the time. I always had to be nervous not be beaten.”

- **Jo Dong-Ik**

10.5 Food

The food given to children in orphanages and relief shelters is similar. They eat corn stalk meal, ground up rice plant root, porridge from noodles, corn rice, etc. None of these are normal foods for Korean people, and are considered animal feed. Worse, this food is non-nutritional, barely filling, and detrimental to the growth of children. Even though the children are fed three times a day, it is still never enough and the memories of being hungry stand out the most for all those interviewed.

“Working was tough but feeling hungry was tougher. There was not enough food to give us enough energy to do the work they wanted us to do.”

- **Jo Dong-Ik**

“I couldn’t sleep because I was so hungry. I laid down to try to sleep but my stomach would burn and hurt that sleep never came. It was so much worse in the winter

because I was also cold.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

“The best memories were when I was full. The worst were when I was hungry. I was never full for long and I was always so hungry. It was quantity over quality.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Children who naturally have a bigger and stronger build than the rest of their peers are able to eat more and live slightly more comfortably; they are the “older brothers” who bully their way to survival:

“Being older and bigger means you’ll have a better life in the relief shelter.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

In contrast, in order to also survive, the smaller children resort to stealing. They sneak away from the relief shelter to go to the marketplace, steal food there, and return before nightfall. They usually eat whatever they find during the day and come back for a place to sleep. But there are more situations when the children cannot fend for themselves and are put in desperate predicaments.

Lee Ga-Yeon was caught stealing a cabbage root. The guard who caught her beat her but she recollects,

“I was so hungry that even as I was getting hit, I kept the cabbage root in my mouth. If I endured it, I could eat it afterwards. If I had not eaten like this, I would have starved to death.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

Park Kyung-ho also recounted a story of his time of how orphanage children tried to overcome intense hunger:

“There was a pile of corn near where we were working. It was ridden with mold. Even so, the children still ate it and threw it up immediately. They ate it just to feel full.

I didn't chew and just swallowed the food. If you chewed, you would get hungry soon. By not chewing the corn and just swallowing it, I was able to keep the corn in the stomach longer for it to digest and not be hungry for a longer time.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

10.6 Labor

The types of child labor found across the country are nearly identical. The work done in public schools and in prison camps, is also done in orphanages and relief shelters alike.

The children are forced to walk a long distance to do farm work. They are required to pull weeds and grass in the cornfields. In the spring, the older children plant seeds; the younger children are not entrusted with the task because they often have no self-control and eat the seeds.

They are also sent to the mountains, and with their lives at risk, are assigned to collect firewood. They must collect their assigned quota before sunset because if they fail to do so, they have to find their way back when it is already pitch black. Many children lose their way, and are presumed dead.

Though most labors are the same, there are some that are particular to the orphanage and relief shelter. In the orphanage Park Kyung-Ho was in, they were known for their brick production.

“The teachers told us that because the ‘Great Leader’ would be coming, we needed to tear down the shabby houses and rebuild them. So we started to make

bricks; I made so many bricks. I had to keep digging vertically until I hit a layer of mud. Then the smaller children would crawl inside and continue digging horizontally along this layer. It would form a cave-like structure and if it collapsed, the kids would be crushed to death. I saw one of my classmates die this way. This was when I was in middle school.

We continued to make bricks every year because word got out that the orphanage sold good bricks. Each class had a quota to meet and we worked ourselves tirelessly to fulfill it. In theory, it was best to pack it during the day but we worked well into the night. But it was the rainy days that were the worst. The bricks needed to stay dry so we would rush to bring them under a roof. We had to carry those heavy bricks and it was like hell.”

- **Park Kyung-Ho**

Additionally, the teachers at the orphanage have their own agenda for the children. The students take care of the teacher’s personal fields. Surprisingly this is work that the orphanage students are eager to do – it is well known that the teacher will feed those students especially well.

The children in the relief shelters did more manual work than those in the orphanages. There are several accounts where the relief shelter children are forced to transport assorted items: rocks, dirt, cabbage roots, etc.

“After the cabbages had been harvested, the teacher ordered us to pull the cabbage roots and carry them. We were constantly moving things back and forth.”

- **Lee Ga-Yeon**

They did these odd jobs for longer hours than the orphanage children; from sunrise to sunset, they worked for the entire day since they do not go to class. We attempted to ask the defectors about the labor they did in a relief shelter, but it was difficult for them to recall anything more specific. They knew that their work was mandatory and daily but some of their most vivid memories were of being famished, tired, and beaten.

11

**Miscellaneous
Child Labor
Outside the
School System**

Schools, prison camps, and orphanages are places where children are gathered in North Korea. These are places to mobilize masses of children to work. However, there are less obvious spaces that exploit children to work, such as detention centers (Ministry of State Security's Detention Center or Correctional Labor Camp⁵⁶).

For people who have been captured and repatriated from China, they are first interrogated to determine if they are a political threat at the Ministry of State Security. If the Ministry of State Security finds out that refugees intended to leave North Korea and were in the process of heading to South Korea or other countries, they are sent to political prison camps. If their stories are convincing enough that they went to China not to defect but to make money or find more to eat, they are put in detention: either a State Political Security Department's Detention Center (*gu-ryu-jang*) or a Correctional Labor Camp (*kyo-hwa-so*). The State Political Security Department's Detention Center is a holding facility, where people wait before they are picked up and returned to their home district's "police stations" to receive appropriate punishment. The wait can take up to months depending upon distance and how readily gas

⁵⁶ DPRK prison. These are named as 'correctional labor camp' to highlight the object of 'correcting' the minds of offenders. "Korean-English Glossary of North Korean Human Rights Terms," *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*, (2016).

and electricity are available.

Children are also brought to these Detention Centers or Correctional Labor Camps. Kim Ha-Sun was a prisoner in a Correctional Labor Camp and witnessed such child labor.

“There were kids in the re-education camp. They stole, following their parents’ example, because it was hard to eat... They were as young as 9, 10 and 14 years old. The re-education camp had a Chinese contract and gave us a lot of work because the forced labor in the re-education camp is free. And during the year I was there, I saw these young children make necklace clasps and work constantly (2009-2010).”

- **Kim Ha-Sun**

The same work is done in a Detention Center, as confirmed by a former inmate. Jung Hye-Sung was 17 when she waited 2 weeks in the camp - by North Korean law, she was not considered a minor but one by the international standard. She had been caught trying to escape to China:

“They made me put together the clasps that go at the end of necklaces - about 1 kg a day per person. The clasps were

very tiny component parts, so making 1kg of them was an arduous labor. I think that this was the work that the Chinese company gave us to manufacture and was later exported back to China... We were forced to make too much to be used in North Korea alone and I also heard that labor is more expensive in China.”

- Jung Hye-Sung

In addition to this miscellaneous work in detention centers, there is hidden footage of children, alongside adults, working to clear the snow in an upscale ski resort in Ma-sik-ryong ⁵⁷, North Korea. Without proper technology or machinery, the roads can only be cleaned with manual labor. As seen in Figure 15, the entire road for several kilometers is lined with laborers, who are hunched over because they do not have the necessary equipment to remove snow. Among these workers, there are children as young as 11 or 12 using flimsy shovels. There are child workers at risk of hypothermia and frostbite while the rich ski with no remorse.

⁵⁷North Korea's top ski resort

Figure 15⁵⁸ - Young children, using inadequate tools to clear the snow-covered roads.



⁵⁸ Bill Neely, "North Korea's Masikryong Ski Resort Is Kept Open by Work Gangs," *NBC News*, 27th January 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/north-korea-s-masikryong-ski-resort-kept-open-work-gangs-n712881>

Part Four

“About 65% of school time was physical labor, and it interfered with my studies.”

Park Dae-Hun

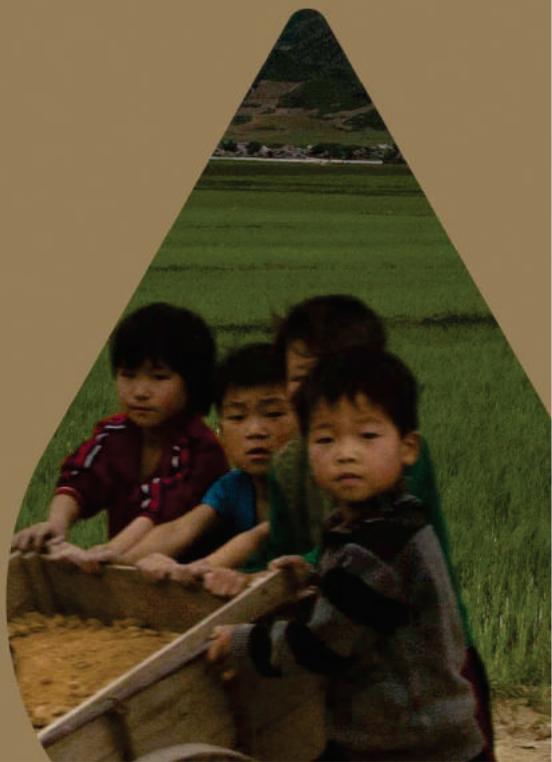
“A ‘bad student’ was basically anyone who wasn’t rich because there was a limit to gathering.”

Kim Jong-Hwa

“Nothing is given to the children. They must work when they are told to do so. Intense labor is the only thing the children receive”

Hong Hye-Jin

Conclusion and Recommendations



12

Conclusion

12.1 Why Human Rights Should Take Precedence

The North Korean government is more concerned with maintaining its dictatorship than promoting basic human rights for its citizens. Its primary objective is to maintain its distorted social structure to protect North Korea's social system and the vested interests of those in power. The notion of human rights in the outside world does not match the North Korean system in place.

Given this reality, North Korea does not enforce child labor due to the lack of resources or economic sanctions. In order to maintain nuclear development and its dictatorship, North Korean citizens are isolated from the outside, and the difficulties caused by this isolation are passed on to the children. North Korea is said to be using foreign aid such as flour and powdered milk, originally to be utilized at orphanages, at major hotels in Pyongyang.⁵⁹

The treatment of North Korean children is not a crisis that can be solved by the economic support of the Republic of Korea and the international community, but the reformation of the fundamental national system that exists in North Korea. That is why some do not comply with the idea of subordinating the value of human rights to the economic and political link with North Korea.

PSCORE produced this report because North Koreans have the claim to enjoy basic human rights. We do not loathe North Korea. Our hope is that the social structure of North Korea will ultimately change and all the people residing there are guaranteed peaceful and happy lives.

North Korea must change, and the direction of

⁵⁹ “North Korea, orphanage support materials are not given to orphanages and are instead used for other purposes”, RFA, May 27th 2016, http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/ne-ms-05272016095117.html

change should usher in a society founded upon respect for human rights. Human rights are a natural freedom that citizens are entitled to. These principles are outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “...Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”⁶⁰

12.2 North Korea's Fifth State Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

North Korea signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. Accordingly, the Government of North Korea must prepare a report on the implementation of the Convention and submit it to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. It released this report on May 13, 2016. After the North Korean government's written response to the committee's pre-deliberation and list of questions, it was decided on September 20, 2017 that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations' would announce some of the statements written in this report.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Exerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

⁶¹ In March 2017, PSCORE arranged a meeting between the UN

From beginning to the end, the report describes North Korea as a beautiful and ideal society in which human rights are thoroughly ensured. We have witnessed the true facts through our own report, and can deduce that the North Korean report contains falsehoods. There is a lot of content and testimony to refute each paragraph; however more specific parts are highlighted below.

Table 7 - North Korea's official State Report to UN CRC, and PSCORE's research that contradicts the report

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
7	The children of North Korea fully enjoy their rights and welfare under the promise and protection of Kim Jong-Un.	According to this report, Kim Jong-Un should be held accountable for North Korea's harsh child labor system.

Committee on the Rights of the Child and defectors. Their testimonies were submitted to the United Nations during the preparation of this report.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/PRK/INT_CRC_NGO_PRK_28906_E.pdf.

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
9	All children in North Korea receive free education starting from kindergarten to high school.	All North Korean defectors refute this statement; although children do not pay tuition, they are forced to labor from morning until evening, and have limited time to study because they are working in rural areas. Children in urban areas work in lieu of money. Defectors particularly rejected the statement that all children are educated because testimonies reveal that the prison camp, the child detention center, and relief center children were not trained at all.
11	The government provides disaster assistance to children and ensures adequate construction and management of buildings like schools and hospitals.	When constructing a school building, students themselves are carrying out the construction projects, and the progress of the construction project takes a toll on the children.

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
13	Revised agricultural legislations are enforced to improve food problems that are crucial to children's health and nutrition.	The North Korean government mobilizes its children for farming and even procuring transporting food for its own needs. The hypocritical nature of child labor lies in that children are forced to work in the agricultural sector and or use other means to avoid the harsh work environment. Ironically, they are also required to pay for the cost of labor that is mandatory of them. The cost of labor then goes to the government and school.

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
17	<p>Associations and organizations have been formed to protect and promote the rights of children. They contribute to the protection of the rights of all children and the realization of these rights upon national policy.</p>	<p>It is a well-known fact that all organizations in North Korea are tied to the government, and in order to analyze these organizations properly, it is necessary to carry out a thorough investigation by focusing on the contents of this report as to whether North Korean children are suffering from forced labor right now. All of the interviewees experienced forced child labor in one form or another. However, the North Korean government has not written of these events, and should be ashamed of the lies they pervade.</p>
20	<p>To guarantee children's rights, join the Human Rights Convention.</p>	<p>Only those who truly advocate for the rights of children and uphold the values of the treaty should boast about being a part of the Human Rights Convention.</p>

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
27-28	A "child" will be defined as 18 years old and under.	North Korea says it will change its mandatory 12-year compulsory education system introduced in 2014 in 2026. It is one of the UN's missions to tirelessly work towards abolishing this system.
81	The North Korean education system has an infrastructure network that provides students with all the information needed for their studies and life.	North Korean children should be able to access the Internet to receive accurate information about subjects with encouragement from the North Korean government. However, they cannot and do not. Immediately, it is easy to see know how wrong the present educational system of Kim Jong-Un's regime is.

Para graph #	North Korean Report on UN CRC	PSCORE's Report According to Defector Testimonies
87-89	Torture and corporal punishments as well as cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment are prohibited.	According to the testimonies of the defectors, it was revealed that children are punished in various ways when children do not participate in forced child labor.
240	Child labor in North Korea was abolished 70 years ago	At a meeting with the UN, North Korea insisted that only three weeks of rural field trips were conducted; however, the month-long rural mobilization of child labor had been identified. This meant that North Korea's announcement was different from actuality, and the UN heavily criticized this.

12.3 The Types of North Korean Child Labor Referred to in this Report

In this section, we briefly summarize each of the child labor investigated in Part 2 and 3 and outline the UN CRC and the economic, social, and cultural aspects of child labor, I compared what violates the International Covenant on Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

12.3.1 Types of Child Labor

Agricultural Labor Support

There is long-term rural mobilization that takes place one or two times every year for a month. There is also local rural labor, which is conducted every afternoon after school.

Children's Initiative

Various items such as used paper, scrap iron, fertilizer (both animal and human), and animal leather are collected for the government every year, and a certain quantity or weight of each demanded from students through the school.

People's Army Support Project

Collecting supplies for soldiers is a mass gathering of toiletries, animal skins, meat, lunch boxes, and socks.

Construction Projects

Students are directly involved in construction work. They are mobilized not only for the building of school facilities, but also for urban apartments and public buildings. They are also required to bring various materials such as money, glass, and cement necessary for construction.

Construction Site Support Project

Students provide meals, snacks, and building materials and supplies to help the construction workers(students) finish their work quickly.

Railway Support Project

Children must move and crush stones from mountains and rivers to flatten the railroad tracks. Children often get hurt because they have limited experience with railway work, and do not know how to work with stones or extension cables.

Caring for School Animals

Schools raise rabbits and goats to cover expenses. Animal management is the responsibility of its students. To build animal hutches, or living spaces, students must make or buy construction materials. Students will even make bricks. If there are absent students, the remaining children must fill the quota.

Environmental Construction Campaign

Students are responsible for landscaping duties such as planting trees and flowers, or cutting grass.

Hygienic Culture Campaign or School Management Campaign

It is a difficult task to adorn the inside and outside of the classroom. Students are responsible for tasks such as polishing window glass and painting. They also use lime powder, a substance used for the maintenance and repair of the buildings. Children use this substance without adequate protection, and their bare hands are riddled with burns and cuts. Children do not receive appropriate treatment or reimbursement for their injuries

Doing Good Work Campaign

A part of the children's "exercise" regime includes cleaning up to improve the campus, and roads. They also landscape (planting trees and laying lawns). Fundraising is also a mandatory activity with quotas that must be met.

Policy Assignment

Children and adults have both individual and collective assignments that are tasked to them, whether it be labor or collection of materials.

Mass Games

The mass games in North Korea are known to have a lot of manpower. During the big Arirang concert, about 50,000 children turn color cards at the same time to create a "animated" mosaic-like background. There are large-scale Pyongyang Arirang performances and small-scale events in each region (Pyongyang Arirang performance has been discontinued since 2013). For Arirang performances, children practice tirelessly for 6-12 months and casualties are inevitable when children practice for hours under the scorching sun.

Ceremonial Parade

Numerous children practice for a few months for a short period of military affairs. These affairs are rituals that showcase strict march by line, arm and foot during various events.

Mobilization for Various Political Events

The government holds political events for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with the South Korean government or the international community (United States) and strengthen internal solidarity. The children march for a few hours while shouting political slogans insulting the South Korean president.

Atmosphere Creation Project

To celebrate senior officials and prominent government figures, children are responsible for a ceremony in which they roam around the city singing songs of praise and holding flowers (of which they are responsible for purchasing themselves) for 30 minutes. This ceremony is supposed to create a happy atmosphere throughout the city

Performances for Soldiers

Children who major in arts are mobilized every year; they practice for several months to perform for military soldiers.

Prison Camp Labor

The children of these camps suffer from all kinds of child labor existing in the North Korean society, and additional labor needed at the camp. The collection of items such as the Children's Initiative are the same, but the quantity required is larger and the environment at the camps is worse. In North Korean society, three years of elementary school and three years of high school are compulsory, but students in the station are sent to the coal mine or workplace after three years of junior high school 13 or 14 years old. The school only teaches basic Korean language and arithmetic.

Orphanage Labor

Children only attend two hours of instruction every day. For the rest of the day, they work at the nearby farms and mountains to make bricks. It is not uncommon for children to run away before they reach the age of seventeen when they are lacking food and steal to

survive or graduate from the orphanage.

Relief Shelter Labor

The relief shelter is generally poorer than the orphanage, and non-orphanage children, defector children, and homeless children are accepted. The labor intensity is higher than the orphanage, such as farm labor, tree planting, carrying heavy materials, and forcing children to work without resting. When the children are accepted for the first time at the shelter, their shoes are taken away.

Child Labor in Correctional Centers

In North Korea's prisons, both adults and children are imprisoned and make accessory parts to export using their free labor force. They must work tirelessly to meet their daily mandatory quota.

12.3.1 North Korean Child Labor Violations of the International Conventions

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) describe the rights of children and the possible violations of child labor that occur in North Korea. Please refer to Appendix D for each detailed text.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Article 3 Best the Interests of Children

Article 12 Respect for a Child's Viewpoint

Article 13 Freedom of Expression

Article 14 Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

Article 24 Enjoyment of Highest Attainable Standard of Health

Article 26 Social Security System

Article 27 Standard of Living

Article 28 Equal Opportunities of Education

Article 29 The Direction of a Child's Education

Article 32 Protection from Economic Exploitation and Hazardous Work

Article 36 Protection from All Forms of Exploitation

Article 39 Promotion of Physical and Psychological Recovery

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Article 10, Clause 3; Protection Against Economic and Social Child Exploitation

Article 11 Adequate Standard of Living

Article 12 (a) Provision of the Reduction of Infant Mortality and Pursuit of Healthy Development

Article 13 Clause 1; Pursuing the right to education and human rights for all.

Article 13 Clause 2, (b) (c); Higher Education Including Vocational Education Accessible to All

12.4 How Exploitative Practices Foster Corruption

The long existence of the harsh exploitative practices of the Agricultural Labor Support, item collections, and construction work leads not only to the desensitization of society to their harm, but also to the perpetuation of corruption. The following testimonies give a glimpse at the widespread corruption either to avoid the difficulties of the given task, or as the only way to complete them. The strenuousness or impossible nature of the tasks give motive for corruption, and the procedure for submission of item collections provides the means to carry it out. The school requires students to submit items for the government and school-run collections through one of two methods.

One is to submit them directly to the teachers, who then pass them onto school executives. The executives then either send the collected items to the Youth League or Children's Union (in the case of the Children's Initiative), or keep them to be used by the school (in the case of school collections).

The second method of item submission involves a type of government-licensed collection center. Instead of handing in items to teachers, students go to such centers in their vicinity, to exchange the required amount of items for a receipt. This receipt would then be turned in to homeroom teachers as a proof that they completed

their assignment.

“We turned in these items to the government-licensed collection center and then gave the certificate of purchase to the school.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“In the Children’s Initiative, we are supposed to turn in everything to the government-licensed collection center, except for the rabbit hide (I would receive it and I would give it to the Children’s Union or the Youth League). Rabbit hide is part of the item collection, but it all goes to the army, so we would collect from the local Youth League Director and the bigger city chapter took it. And we would receive receipts if we gave it to the government-licensed collection center.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“In elementary school, we had to supply scrap paper to factories, which then issued certificates that needed to be turned in to the school.”

- **Lee Ji-Eun**

While the majority of students collect most items

(e.g.: waste papers, medicinal herbs, manure) themselves, children from wealthier families simply purchase the required items and turn them in. In addition, some items are nearly impossible to find due to their scarcity or the excessively high amount required. Rabbit hides and scrap iron, for example, are among such items.

Rabbit hide is demanded at least once or twice per semester, and the number of sheets asked for each time ranges from two to five sheets. Its cost depends on the quality; most defectors reported paying anywhere from 4,000 KPW to 7,000 KPW, close to the price of 1 kg of rice, as of May 2016.

“For Children’s Initiative, we had to bring in mittens sewn out of old, unwearable clothes to ‘donate’. When we couldn’t make them because we didn’t have a sewing machine, we bought them directly at a market. When we couldn’t even buy them, we had to donate money.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“It was hard to gather scrap iron, so I turned in money instead (scrap iron was the only item that could be substituted with money). Most rich students did the same thing.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“A ‘bad student’ was basically anyone who wasn’t rich because there was a limit to gathering. One piece of rabbit hide cost 4,000 KPW, so many students just bought 5 kg of rice.”

- **Kim Jong-Hwa**

“My elementary, middle, and high school and college all asked for rabbit hide, but I had no way of getting it, so I either bought it or donated money.”

- **Lee Ji-Eun**

If the school requires students to submit items to a government-licensed collection center, students often bribe the center staff instead of purchasing the required items. For a sum of money, the center staff would issue receipt that confirms full submission of the amount of items asked by the Youth League. The higher the quantity of items one student has to submit, the higher the price demanded by the center staff to issue the receipt. Although this practice is carried out in secret, most parents are aware of its existence and often resort to paying off the center staff when physically gathering the items becomes challenging.

“It was a little tiring but I kept handing over scrap rubber. I ended up paying the collection center staff (30,000 KPW for 0.5 kg of scrap rubber). We did this in

secret, but then we were found out.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

“We had to collect scrap paper and scrap iron and turn them into school every year. However, it was really difficult to obtain them, so I went to a government-licensed collection center, paid double the price of what I was supposed to collect, and got a receipt indicating that I’ve turned in the items.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

“There is a government-licensed collection center in each district and my mother would pay \$100 every school semester, take the receipt, and submit it to the school.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

In a similar way, those who can afford to can turn in money or items like corn or rice to the teachers, and could be exempt from the Agricultural Labor Support for one afternoon, or in some cases, for weeks. Instead, those students engage in different extracurricular activities aimed at self-development, such as sports or music. More often than not, the wealthiest bribed school principals rather than teachers. Unlike teachers, principals possess considerable influence, power, and

wealth. They have the exclusive right to write college recommendation letters for students, present students with various awards that could improve their chances of getting into college, select students who will participate in honorable events in Pyongyang, and demand a higher quantity of items than required by the government, for private gain.

Bribery is more common in larger cities like Pyongyang where wealth is concentrated. There, a higher percentage of students can buy their way out of the Agricultural Labor Support compared to rural areas. Some defectors testified that the school uses the money or items received in this way to hire external workers. While students from wealthier families can pay their way out of Agricultural Labor Support, focus on studying, and get better results, the less well-off cannot afford to opt out. In the long run, this perpetuates the wealth disparity between rich and poor in North Korea.

“Kids from rich families could spend that time [allotted to Agricultural Labor Support] for self-development by turning in some corn or rice. My dad was a coal-mine supervisor, so my family was rather wealthy. Instead of going to the Agricultural Labor Support, I learned to play the accordion. However, I still went three times a week because I could not

pay every time.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“The school principal had the authority to manage the right of camping, the right to give awards to students, and the right to recommend students to college. The right of camping is the right that the principal could recommend students if the school could afford to go to a good camping place.⁶² Once the government informed the school of the number of people who could go to the good camping place, the principal could choose those students. When the school was given a good opportunity, the principal would choose which student would get to enjoy that opportunity. Such opportunities included the right of camping, participating in the one-thousand-miles long journey⁶³ for

⁶² In North Korea, schools oversee camping with each having several designated “camping sites.” Certain students are rewarded by being allowed to go to these sites. In reality, it is a privilege for the wealthy or those whose families can bribe school officials.

⁶³ Kim Il-Sung lived in China in 1923 when he was twelve years old. He walked along the road to Pyongyang from China to return to his country and learn about it. It is a hard task for students to do but it helps them see the provinces and is a favorable qualification for university and job applications.

learning, attending big events in Pyongyang as the representative of the school, and participating in the Pyongyang Arirang mass games.

The principal also has the right to give out awards. If a student receives an award, it is useful when he or she applies to a university. For this reason, the principal asks the parents for big favors such as getting him a new house during the college application period. If there is a student from a well off background, that privilege is entirely transferred to the principal. If you wanted to participate in the one-thousand-miles long journey for learning, you could ask your teacher, but asking the principal is more effective. Principals of middle schools and high schools are very well off. They naturally receive bribes when items are gathered for the Children's Initiative and People's Army Support Project"

- Yoon Sul-Mi

"When students transfer to a school of the next level, they are in a competition of giving the best gifts to the principal since they need to get letters of

recommendation from him. I heard that the principal's house was as magnificent as a museum. Kindergartners already know the system and therefore beg their parents to get something for the principal. They sometimes even clean the teachers' shoes. The parents gradually become worn out."

- Kim Yeon-Ri

"The teachers also bribe the principal. They usually give him money. That's because they need to gain his favor in order to be designated to a good class. They have to be the teacher of a rich class in order to receive a good amount of money from the students. They give bribes to the principal at his children's wedding and when his parents have their 60th birthday parties. And they visit the principal during each big national holiday."

- Kim Eun-Hee

"When we go out to work, we are told that 'we are working in farms to support the farmlands and to produce more foods', and then a part of the harvest is given to the school principal. Then, the principal

*and some of the teachers share it.
Nothing is given to the children. They
must work when they are told to do so.
Intense labor is the only thing the children
receive.”*

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

12.5 Overall Impact of Exploitative Practices on Children’s Education

While both the Agricultural Labor Support and the item collections interfere with the ability of the students to focus on basic school subjects, the Agricultural Labor Support’s negative impact on education is greater. For item collections, the school expects students to gather a certain quantity of goods by a specified deadline. It does not matter when the students collect these items, as long as they are submitted on time. Agricultural Labor Support, on the other hand, runs on a fixed schedule. Schools require students to labor in farms for a specific period of time. It also tends to take more time than the item collections since it extends over different time slots (e.g. after-school, during breaks, long-term). Because of this, students have even less time to dedicate to studying. Those who could afford it bribed the teachers to be exempted from Agricultural Labor Support.

Students who specialize in the arts, music, or

sports are also allowed an absence or minimal participation in the Agricultural Labor Support so that they can use the time to hone their skills. These students are routinely mobilized for countless practices for political events and campaigns.

“If you study arts and physical education, you are not supposed to do labor [like everyone else]. But you still have to work for one or two hours.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“About 65% of school time was physical labor, and it interfered with my studies.”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

“It [Agricultural Labor Support] definitely prevented me from studying. They only made us work. Machinery in North Korea couldn’t be put into use. Thus, the people had to toil endlessly to make up for the limitations of machines. We had to focus especially on the Agricultural Labor Support 3 months out of a year. Even supposing we devote 7 months to regular school subjects, we still had to work in the afternoons, so there was almost no studying. I think work took up about one third of school life.”

- **Park Ji-Uk**

“We spent more time working than we did studying: we studied in the morning and we worked in the afternoon until the sun set. But if we failed to memorize something during class in the morning, they would make us come back after work and study more. That time, I remember them making us memorize, in English, something like, “Great General Kim Jong-Il...” It was the North Korean ideology education translated into English.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

“Because I was the class president, I didn’t have to work. But I knew that the other kids could not avoid it. They would divide the students up into groups and give them an assignment, but there were some who weren’t able to finish the work in the given time. There was too much work and it was so tiring. Even during exams, when it would have been good if they were given some time to study, the students were forced to keep working. On regular school days, they worked everyday.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

Moreover, the school attendance rate decreases as students begin to skip school in order to miss the Agricultural Labor Support. Not only do they find the labor exhausting, but they would rather work at their parents' farm to help put food on the table. And in some schools, in order to complete it students are required to work for the entire day, with no classes provided to them.

“The attendance rate was 70-80% on good days and 50% on the bad ones. Students skipped school in order to make a living. The absence rate began to increase starting from the 5th grade of elementary school. Students would have to do farm labor if they came to school anyway, so they would rather skip school and help their own parents.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

“Day after day, for one week, we would we would drive to Baekdu Mountain and back (the journey takes 3 to 4 hours, twice as long as it should, due to the terrible condition of the roads). We would stay there for the entire day, picking blueberries. We were not given any classes, not even in the morning.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“There is not that much different between high school and middle school. However, there is more physical labor to do. We had to pay if we didn’t want to work.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

13

Recommendations

This report, including numerous testimonies and pieces of evidence, has shown that children in North Korea are being abused and exploited and these exploitative practices accentuate the gap between rich and poor.

PSCORE urges the international community to work toward the eradication of child labor in North Korea and to assist, in as many ways as possible, those who are working toward the resolution of this issue.

13.1 Recommendations to the International Community

1. South Korea, the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and other nations that are part of the international community need to strongly demand North Korea to immediately end all forms of child labor, item collections, national mobilization, and other forms of exploitation when approving regarding North Korea.
2. Institutions and organizations that are able to do so should continue to communicate, to the peoples of the United Nations and the international community, the situation of children's rights in North Korea.
3. Businesses, states, NGOs and individuals need to check and reevaluate all trades, services, and contracts within/with North Korea that could be using child labor. Governments must fully explain this situation to their citizens before they visit North Korea.
4. Although DPRK is not one of the member states of ILO, ILO should realize the reality of how North Korea completely ignores the international standards on child labor and recommend improvement on this matter. The international community should provide the funding that is needed for making changes in the system.

5. We suggest that, as North Korea endeavors to eradicate child labor, third party experts should be allowed to join in and evaluate the progress made. We recommend that this process be conducted with transparency, and that any progress achieved be made public.

6. The member states of the UN need to express their concern for the child labor situation in North Korea. They must mention their deep concern about child labor and insist on making a resolution about the matter whenever they meet North Korean delegates or government officers.

13.2 Recommendations for North Korea

We urge the Government of the DPRK to improve the quality of life of the people and, in particular, to immediately stop exploitation through child labor and recommend the following:

1. While the constitution of the DPRK states that child labor is illegal, there seem to be no set standards as to what constitutes child labor. We recommend that definite standards be set and that the North Korean public be informed of them. The purpose is (1) for the public to be able to unmistakably identify and report instances of child labor, and (2) for the perpetrators to be duly penalized.
2. We recommend that the DPRK raises the minimum working age for children who are currently working to 18 years old.
3. We recommend the DPRK to provide proper and extensive education in schools, accessible to all children that meet the criteria of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education should be equally provided for children not only in orphanages and nursing centers but also in prison camps.

4. We urge the government of the DPRK to make provisions of nutritional foods for proper growth and development to all the children living in North Korea, without exception.
5. We urge the government of the DPRK to provide any material or finances that schools may need in accordance to what it has promised to do in their constitution. The school must not force students to collect goods or funds to secure operating funds or necessary supplies, and should concentrate solely on the children's education.
6. We urge the government of the DPRK to ensure that no children are kept in conditions where they are denied their basic human needs such as nutritious food and proper healthcare.
7. We urge the government to cease and end the Children's Initiative, Item Collections, Agricultural Labor Support and all forms of child labor within the DPRK.
8. We urge the detention of political prisoners be ceased immediately, and that the families of the prisoners not be collectively punished nor incarcerated. In addition, children, minors, and

adults who were born in a *kwan-li-so* or entered one as a child should be freed.

9. We urge the complete overhaul of the orphanage system in North Korea. The government must provide more funding, better caretakers, and ensure orphanages do not engage in any type of child labor.
10. We urge that more funding be allocated to rations and welfare programs for children.
11. To ensure that all the suggested measures described in this report become realities, many national finances will be needed. Firstly, the North Korean government must recognize the flaws and failures of the current totalitarian system in which it upholds and call for the establishment of a democratic system at a level recognized by the international community. If North Korea opens itself politically, investment from the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the rest of the world will continue, resulting in the economic improvement and expansion of national finances in North Korea.

Appendix

"The teacher checked if students brought in the required items daily. If they hadn't, he or she would be punished."

Kim Sang-Ho

"On the weekends too, we had meetings to prepare songs of loyalty for Kim Il-Sung's and Kim Jong-Il's birthdays. We also had to memorize and present revolutionary history in front of other students."

Kim Sang-Ho

"Everyone, elementary and middle schoolers, worked on the field not only on the weekends but also during class time."

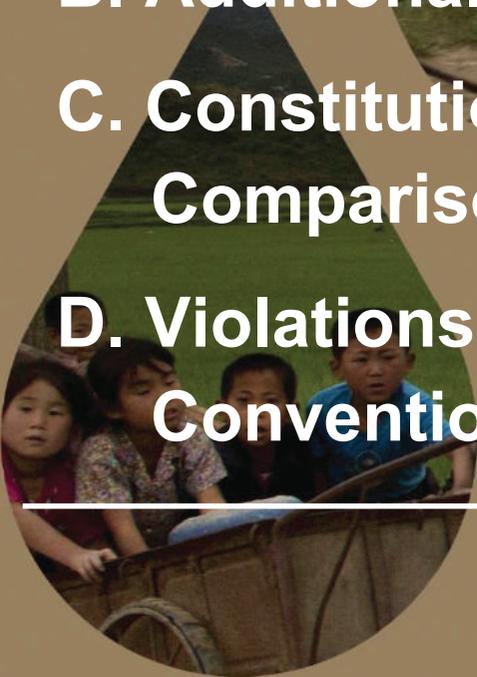
Hong Hye-Jin

**A. Hierarchy and Structure
of the Children's
Initiative**

B. Additional Testimonials

**C. Constitutional Article
Comparison**

**D. Violations of the UN
Conventions**

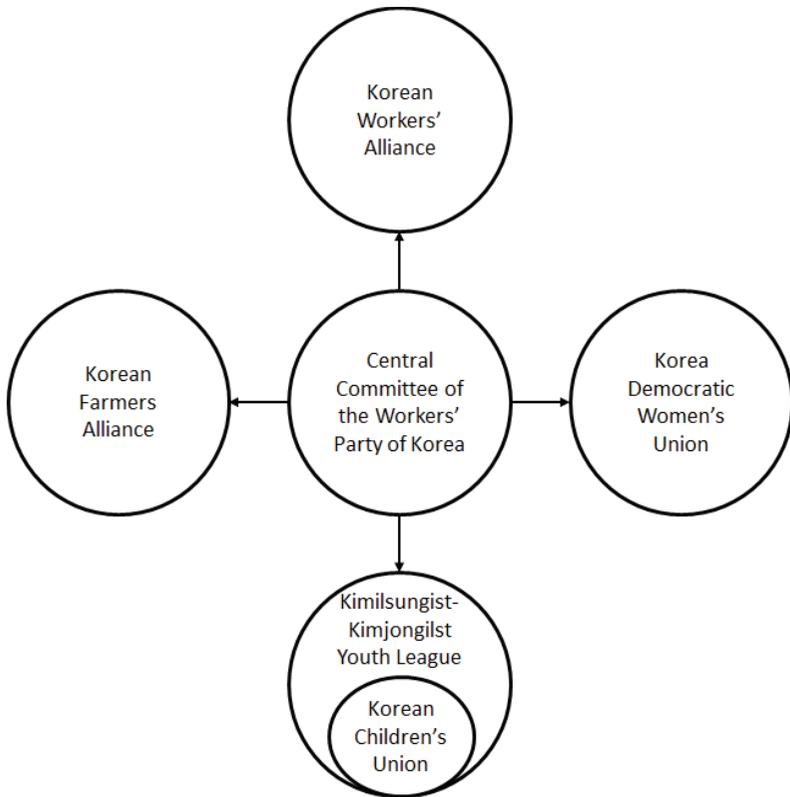


A. Hierarchy and Structure of the Children's Initiative

Although the Children's Initiative is implemented by individual schools, it is planned and controlled by the government. The systematized structure of the Children's Initiative reveals the pervasiveness of child labor authorized and endorsed by the government itself. In North Korea, every citizen must belong to the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and/or at least one party-affiliated organization.⁶⁴ It is a strategy in which the North Korean government maintains direct surveillance and control over its citizens and applies the socialist principles the nation is founded on. The WPK, essentially the central government of North Korea, plans item collection projects according to its various needs and allots an assignment to its sub-committees and civil organizations, such as the Korean Farmers Alliance, the Korean Workers' Alliance, the Korea Democratic Women's Union, the Korean Children's Union and the Youth League.

⁶⁴ "Understanding North Korea," *MOU Institute for Unification Education* (2014), pp.366-367.

Figure A.1 - Diagram of the political organizations of North Korea and their connections



As the name implies, the Korean Children’s Union (also known as the Korean Youth Corps) is the first civil organization all North Korean children are required to join when they advance to elementary school at the age of 7.⁶⁵ They remain with the Korean Children’s Union

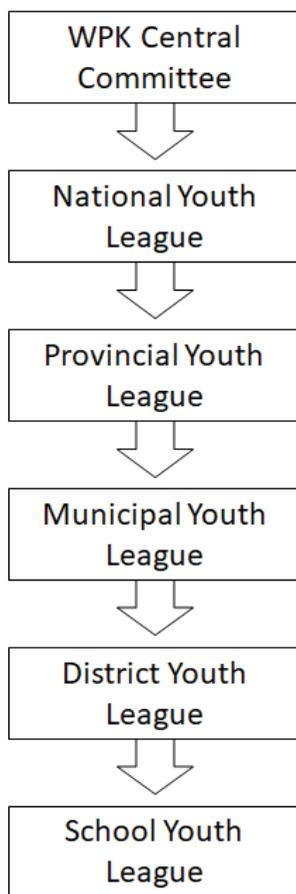
⁶⁵ “Korean-English Glossary of North Korean Human Rights Terms,” *National Human Rights Commission of Korea*,

through the age of 13. When these children enter their third grade of middle school at 14, they must then join the Kimilsungist-Kimjongilist Youth League until they turn 30, the age at which they join other organizations. Both organizations were founded by Kim Il-Sung in 1946.

Taking the Youth League as an example to show the chain of command for the Children's Initiative, the WPK devises and gives the Children's Initiative assignments to the national Youth League, which then gives the order to each provincial Youth League. The provincial Youth Leagues then deliver the command to the Youth League in each of their municipality. Next, each municipal Youth League passes on the instructions to its district Youth Leagues. At last, the Youth League at each school within the districts receives the assignments.

(2016). The glossary refers to the Youth Corps, though for this report, the Corps will be referred to as the Korean Children's Union.

Figure A.2 – Command structure of the Children’s Initiative



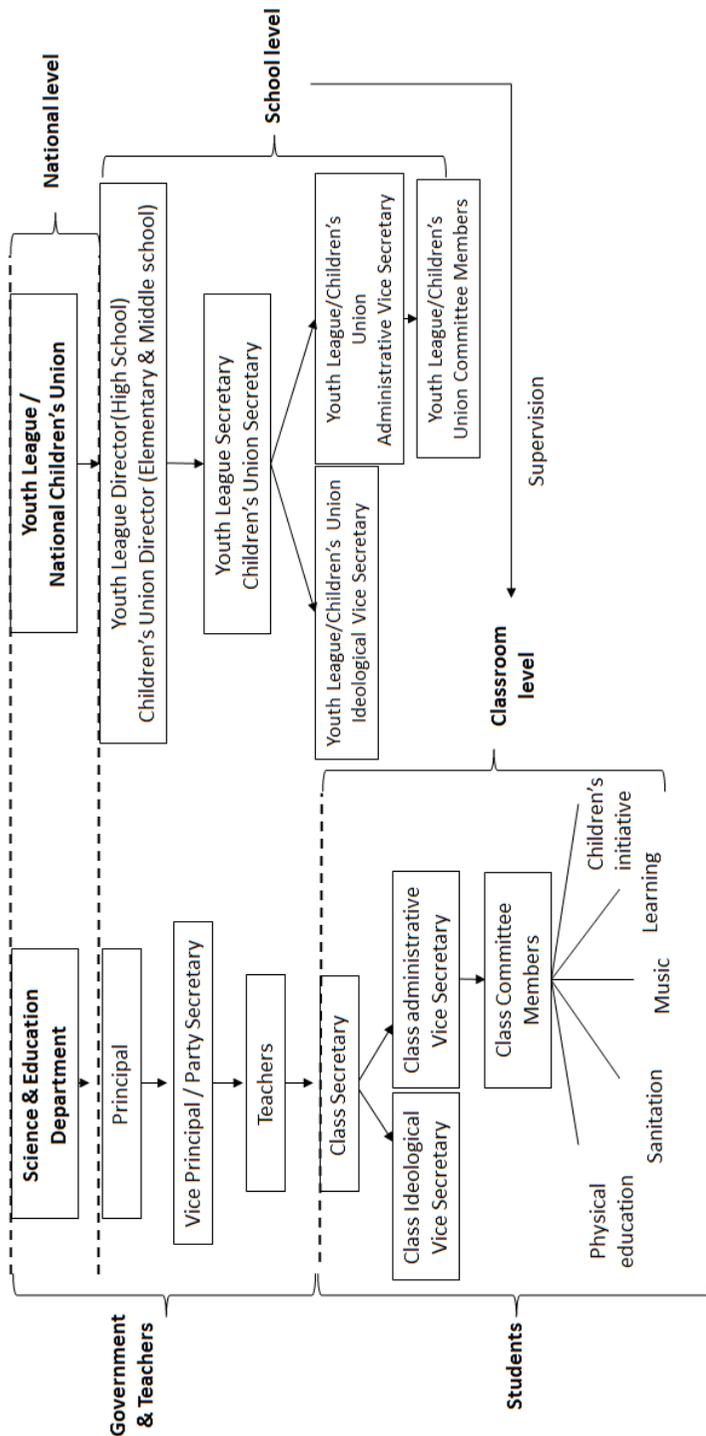
The command hierarchy of the Children’s Initiative does not end here. Once the assignments get to the schools from the Central Committee of the WPK, there are more steps before the students receive the assignments.

At each school, there is one Youth League Director dispatched by the Central Committee.⁶⁶ Every day, during a specific break time between classes, the Class Secretary (a student) from each homeroom meets with the Director to receive the Children's Initiative assignments and ideological education materials. Then, each Secretary returns to his or her class to dispatch assignments to individual students. In this way, individual students receive a list of items and amounts to bring by a certain time.

Figure A.3 – Command structure of the Children's Initiative within the school system⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Jeon Sang-bong, "The Status and Role of Youth League in North Korea," *Tongil News*, 16th January 2006, <http://www.tongilnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=62434>.

⁶⁷ May vary slightly from school to school depending on size and characteristics



“Every day during the break time after the second period ended, the Youth League Secretary from each class met with the Youth League Director to get the assignment given by the government. The Secretary would say ‘Today, there was a meeting about ‘something’. Our school is assigned ‘x amount of work’, and our class needs to bring in these particular items.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

As observed in the chain of command, the school principals and the homeroom teachers do not have an official role in giving or carrying out the Children’s Initiative assignments. Therefore, the role they naturally assume is interrogating students when they are assigned item collection projects by the Central Committee.

The Children’s Initiative is a nationwide item collection project planned by the central government. Due to its highly systematic structure, every student in North Korea, regardless of where he or she lives, ends up receiving a list of items to collect and submit to the school for the Children’s Initiative. The onerous labor children are subject to is essentially demanded by the North Korean government. The Children’s Initiative has become inevitable for several reasons, and the responsibility unquestionably lies with the North Korean

government.

“For the Children’s Initiative, we had to collect scrap iron, scrap papers, scrap bottles, rabbit hide, etc. Whether you were in Pyongyang or elsewhere, it was the same throughout the country.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

B. Additional Testimonials

B.1 On the Agricultural Labor Support

“During the Chinese cabbage season, we planted Chinese cabbages, and in the fall, we helped with the harvest. We went to a farm 2-3 hours away from my hometown by car. Attendance was mandatory. I didn’t have to worry about heating because it was summer, but we had to bring our own food. For lodging, every 2 or 3 students stayed with a family living in the village. There was a separate dining hall to prepare food; a portion of the class stayed at the dining hall to prepare food.”

- **Kim Jin-Joo**

“Although I didn’t want to work and I just wanted to play, I knew this was something I had to do. After my mother went to South Korea when I was 15, I believed that I had to be the best at everything, otherwise the rest of society would think badly of me. My father reinforced this belief.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

“The teachers told us ‘the agricultural labor support is from this day to this day. Anyone not participating should stay.’ I answered the teacher and missed the labor support. We had

to pay one bill (\$100) or two bills. The teachers probably shared this money among themselves or with the principal.”

- **Kim Yeon-Ri**

“Having to do the Agricultural Labor Support, work they told us to do in addition to preparing for various events was very hard. Being forced to do things I didn’t want to do was hard.”

- **Hwang Soo-Min**

“I have skipped school because I didn’t want to participate in the Agricultural Labor Support.”

- **Jung Yoon-Bo**

B.1.1 Local Agricultural Labor Support:

“There was different work for each season. From March, we sowed corn and bean seeds one by one with our hands. In the summer, we did weeding. In the fall, we helped with the harvest and reaped corn crops one by one. In the winter, we went around to pick up compost.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“There was different work for each season. There wasn’t much work in the winter but a ton in the spring and summer. We transplanted rice seedlings and weeded the rice paddy and the yard of a business the school partnered with. The school had no money, so they had no other choice. It is a way of helping other businesses and maintaining the school by receiving materials from the business instead.”

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

“Our work differs depending on the season. In March, we plant a corn ‘nutrition jar’ on the field, and in autumn, we pick corns and harvest and thresh rice. When we went to plant the nutrition jar, we carried a large bottle of water on our heads to water the field when we plant corn. The nutrition jar was made for various things such as corn, pepper, and eggplants.”

- **Hong Hye-Jin**

“Although the Agricultural Labor Support was difficult, I liked being able to be with my friends in the afternoon. At the time, I thought this was a normal part of education process. The most difficult work was weeding underneath the scorching sun all day”

- **Park Dae-Hun**

B.1.2 Local Agriculture Labor Support Schedule

“In the morning, we went to school, and in the afternoon, we went out to the Agricultural Labor Support doing things like rice-planting.”

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

“Starting in my first grade of high school, we also went to a daylong Agricultural Labor Support to do weeding, composting fields, etc.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“We participated in the Agricultural Labor Support even during breaks for one or two days.

The students studied at school in the mornings, and after having lunch at home, we came together at 2 and worked until 6 or 8 pm. Those in the first and second year of primary school were given tasks such as cleaning the schoolyard, and those who were older such as high schoolers worked until sunset.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“In elementary and middle school, we had to be at school by 8:30 am, and teachers, 7:30 am.

Everyone ate lunch at home and then came back to school. School ended around 3:30 pm after afternoon classes. Afterward, there was a lot of farm work for students living in the rural area. When there wasn't much work to be done, we went twice or three times a week, and at other times, we went every day on weekdays."

- **Kim Hak-Chul**

"In middle school, I did a lot of farm labor at a local farm. I transplanted rice seedlings, cultivated Chinese cabbages, etc. We didn't work every day but still worked about three times a week after school. Work was mandatory."

- **Kim Jin-Joo**

"The children in wealthier regions are not forced to work later hours or else the parents would cause a commotion. The main reason was that the children would not be able to receive private lessons from a tutor after school had they been forced to do labor. Since the parents are financially supporting the teachers, they also have high demands. Children are sent home at the latest before 7 pm. However, I also have experiences living in other agricultural areas, and in those areas, children are not sent back home until all the work is

done. Even if it is after 8:30 pm, they have to work until they are done with their work.”

- **Koo Dong-Su**

“There was work to do every day. Even though there were extracurricular activities after school, we first did labor and then went to extracurricular activities. On Saturdays, we had saeng-hwal-chong-hwa in the morning and physical labor in the afternoon.”

- **Park Ji-Uk**

“I lived in an agricultural region, so I had classes in the mornings and labor to do in the afternoons. I worked from around 2 to 6 pm in the afternoon. Then I returned to school to attend a criticism session and receive some information that I had to know, and then I went back home after 7 pm.”

- **Park Jong-Woo**

“Starting in middle school, they always made us work. Beginning in third year of middle school, we went out to the Local Agricultural Labor Support (example: gathering acorns, felling trees in the fall). During the Arduous March, we

went around to dig arrowroots. It was the same in Pyongyang.”⁶⁸

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“In the afternoon, there were extracurricular activities, such as weeding, Agricultural Labor Support, railroad and road construction support, etc. We also worked at a nearby farm for an hour or two. It was considered a mandatory. The working environment was hit or miss. Sometimes you are assigned to a wealthier farm where you are given meals and snacks and sometimes to a poorer farm.”

- **Park Jong-Gu**

B.2 On Item Collections

“For the Children’s Initiative, there is a nationwide mandate from the government. I had to turn in 3 pieces of rabbit hide and seed oil per year.”

- **Moon Yoon-Ji**

“In elementary school, we collected scrap paper and iron once a week, 1 kg each.

Because people were asking for scrap paper

⁶⁸ The Arduous March was a severe, North Korean, famine from 1994 to 1998.

and scrap metal, there was a distributor who sold it.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“I was asked to bring 10 kg of scrap papers and 20 kg of scrap iron in a month in elementary school.”

- Park Chang-Shik

“Since it was very difficult to gather and bring firewood to school every time the school asked for it, the mother of the class president collected money that is worth approximately 25 kg of rice from every student’s mother and bought all of it at once at a market. And then she turned it in school by a truck. Students who turned in more money got to sit close to the heater.”

- Kim Sae-Joon

“Firewood necessary for the heater in the winter was collected from students in each class. My father worked in a factory that processed woods, so I supplied firewood to the school.”

- Choi Eun-Young

“Although there was no tuition, we paid money to buy firewood because there was no heating.

We paid about 40,000 or 50,000 KPW once a year in November (worth 10 kg of rice). However, it was still cold even though they made a fire in the stove. Burning wood for an hour in the morning had little effect.”

- **Kim Jin-Joo**

“We paid money to keep the school running. The money was used to buy the school’s computers and TVs, and to change the whiteboards.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“We paid money to the school once a year for the school’s maintenance. But we would additionally pay once every three months for some other reason.”

- **Yang Soon-Yi**

“On national holidays July 27th, June 25th and August 15th, there are many merchants and traders who sell the items.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

B.2.1 Punishments for Failure to Complete Item Collections

“A ‘good student’ had 100% attendance and good grades and brought everything the school

asked for. A 'bad student' was caught smuggling goods, had low attendance and bad grades, thieved, worked instead of coming to school, had his/her classmates make a visit to his/her house for being absent, etc.

My homeroom teacher even went to a student's house at dawn to bring him to school, but the student still ran away after two hours.

Teachers beat bad students almost to death."

- **Park Ji-Uk**

"When we couldn't bring in the requested items, the school sent us back home."

- **Heo Sang-Yoon**

"The teacher checked every day and gave punishment to those who couldn't bring all the requested items the school asked for."

"For the first stage, after the last class, during a short homeroom period, the teacher called out the names of students who failed the Children's Initiative. It was especially embarrassing in a coed school.

During the second stage every Saturday at the mutual criticism session of saeng-hwal-chong-hwa, those who failed the Children's Initiative would once again become the target of

criticism.

Lastly, in the third stage, the school wouldn't issue the certificate of studentship."

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

B.3 On Miscellaneous Forms of Child Labor

"I think physical labor takes up about 40% of education, and physical labor of students is explained to the public as a rightful activity. It most definitely interfered with our education because instead of studying, we had to do Background Art every day and learn different dances."

- **Kim Sae-Joon**

"We received a message from the Youth League telling us to assemble for the mass rallies. This was during the presidency of Lee Myung Bak of South Korea. We would gather at the square and shout the phrase "Punish Gee Myung Bak" (a malapropism, with "gee" referring to "rat")."

- **Yang Soon-Yi**

"Political campaigns were held annually on June 25th (Day of Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War). In the morning, we would practice chanting "let's crush the

American invaders.” In the afternoon, we would declare, “I will become a soldier of the Korean People’s Army.” Three or four times every year, we would also visit an exhibition on how the American Invaders committed atrocities against the Korean people. Political campaigns were held not only on June 25th but also every time the state of affairs became rough. If you were a North Korean, you had to take part in criticizing Lee Myung Bak (the former South Korean President).”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“I joined the Children’s Union in second grade of elementary school. From my third or fourth grade in elementary school to my third year in middle school, we practiced the ceremonial parade for various occasions. One episode I remember is to show loyalty to Kim Il-Sung for his birthday on April 15th, third and fourth graders in the Hyesan area (approximately 100,000 students) all gathered in the Hyesan Stadium every day starting on April 3rd or 4th until the day of celebration. In the morning, we had classes, and in the afternoon in the stadium, starting at 1, we had a roll call for 30 minutes and then practiced the ceremonial parade until 6 to sync our moves to one another’s. We did this every day, including Saturdays and some Sundays just to show a

10-minute ceremonial parade to 10 to 20 regional party executive officials who attended the celebration on April 15th.”

- **Ahn Sang-Min**

“On the weekends too, we had meetings to prepare songs of loyalty for Kim Il-Sung’s and Kim Jong-Il’s birthdays. We also had to memorize and present revolutionary history in front of other students.”

- **Kim Sang-Ho**

“There was the mass dance, or ‘pigtail ribbon’ dance, for Saturday events. Every Saturday, schools in each district gathered and marched together in a ceremonial parade (similar to a review of troops).”

- **Kim Jin-Joo**

“During the mass games season, we would practice the choreography of dances taught by the teacher in charge of the mass games activities (the school’s physical education teacher). On the pretext that we vow loyalty, whatever the party decides on (for instance, ‘We would like to present the General with this gift on August 15th’ or ‘We would like to make a video clip of this to send to the General’) we would practice whatever dances the teachers memorized at the Children’s Palace to teach

us. Managing the practices were the duties of the homeroom teachers. The physical education teachers had the responsibility of managing the overall curriculum of practices of the whole school. We did this about once every year.

This did not exist in the countryside before, but it started because of the competitions for loyalty. Each school had a different general sports activities. They had different specializations. Depending on the specialty of the school's physical education teachers, some schools had all the students perform ribbon gymnastics. The mass games were held on celebratory days like April 15th (Day of the Sun, Kim Il Sung's birthday) or February 16th (Day of the Shining Star, Kim Jong Il's birthday)."

- Yoon Sul-Mi

"Students had to gather at a given location on days of political campaigns like February 16th, April 15th, and June 6th (The Founding Day of the Korean Children's Union) and attend the mandatory "mass games" that lasts for about 10 days. Some students had to walk about an hour to go and participate.

As part of a political campaign within our

school, we performed what was called the ‘Songs of Loyalty’. We rehearsed for the event, which was held on December 24th, for about week or two. We performed at our school theater.

We had to mix clay and rice straws and make them into bricks at school. These bricks were used when building new structures in school. We did this during the summer, when we didn’t have to go and help with the work in the farming area. We did this about two or three times every month.”

- Yoon Kang-Sook

“I worked crushing pebbles to smooth out the train tracks.

We perform the ‘Songs of Loyalty’ every year on December 24th. We practiced for about one month. We were required to memorize a poem. We also had to memorize scripts and data of [the Kim family’s] greatness for recitation during performances. Every grade level had to memorize different epic poems (about 3 or 4 students had to memorize poetry approximately the length of 3 or 4 pages of the Rodong newspaper for recitation. The recitation takes about 20 minutes) and perform in choir, duet, trios,

solo, and ensembles. Every student of all grade levels had to participate.⁶⁹ Each performance is about an hour and a half long, and we had to watch every performance of each grade level.

They told us to bring the necessary material for refurbishing the school (cement, sand, bricks, blocks, and etc). I remember them telling us, ‘Bring a few bricks’. There was no place to gather such material, in other words, they were simply demanding money.”

- **Park Chang-Shik**

“On February 16th (Day of the Shining Star; Kim Jong-Il’s birthday) and April 15th (Day of the Sun; Kim Il-Sung’s birthday), we had to leave flowers at the statues of Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung, but the cost of flowers was high (equivalent of one person’s food expenses for the day).

They asked for 1-2 kg of cement, sand, iron,

⁶⁹ The Rodong Sinmun, the organ of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party, is by far the most important newspaper in North Korea. Fyodor Tertitskiy, “Read All About It: North Korea’s Newspapers and How They Differ,” *NK News*, 21st March 2017, <https://www.nknews.org/2017/03/read-all-about-it-north-koreas-newspapers-and-how-they-differ/>.

etc. once a month. It was a huge burden every time they asked for something, especially things like cement because there was no place to find it.”

- **Choi Eun-Young**

B.4 On the Services Performed for Teachers

“As a parent, I thought, ‘the children are so small, why do they have to collect so much and offer it’

“As a student, I was sorry for giving burden to my parents but I never actually said those words to them. This was something I had to do and as well as something my parents would do for me. It was 60% feeling that the money was wasteful and 40% feeling sorry toward my parents. In high school, I started to think, ‘why do I have to do this every month. But if I didn’t, there was no way out, especially if there was no solution. So I would just bring the items. If I didn’t bring the items, the teacher would constantly send other children until I couldn’t bear it anymore. You had to bring the items and that was the only way.

“I think students felt sorry for the teachers. ‘The teachers can’t do much themselves and

have to work hard like that'....”

- Kim Eun-Hee

“There were kind teachers who couldn’t bring themselves to tell the children to collect items; only about one in ten. Kids would collect something on their own and help the teacher. Even as children, they knew that they needed to help the teacher. They wanted to look good in front of the teacher in order to be given better treatment in the class. It wasn’t out of courtesy toward the teacher, it was a way for them to live better for them to take care of the things that the nation could not do.

Students also thought that ‘I should look good to the teacher to survive in this group [class] and make my grade better through my payment.’ I gave my payment to the middle school teacher voluntarily. I thought I was gracious to my teacher.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“Teachers are often unable to make a living because their salaries, although paid by the government, are so small. You have no money left when you buy a pack of cigarettes (1,500 KPW) with your salary. You can buy about 1 kg

of rice. In 2010, my monthly salary was 2,200 KPW. And there were many times when they didn't pay at the scheduled time. For example, if teachers haven't received their wages for 5 months, the teachers and school accountant would decide to collect every teacher's one month's worth of salary and use that sum to bribe the bank clerk in order to receive their 4 months' worth of salary sooner."

- Kim Hak-Chul

"Teachers in economic difficulties were more harsh to their students. So the teachers asked for supplies from wealthier parents."

- Yoon Kang-Sook

"The students would gather food for teachers every month, especially during holidays, including their birthdays, Teacher Appreciation Day, and graduation day."

- Kim Jong-Hwa

"Students had to hand in money to the school (when there was a scratch or a trivial damage to the building, each student was asked to pay

5 or 10 cents). And the teachers took out some money for themselves out of this “donation.” Same with the agricultural labor support - the teachers made students work and took a portion of the harvest.”

- Kim Sang-Ho

“On the days we didn’t go farming, we would have to help out on the teacher’s field. Everyone, elementary and middle schoolers, worked on the field not only on the weekends but also during class time.”

- Hong Hye-Jin

“Whatever gifts the children received from the government went through the school. And they would always give half of it to their teacher, especially because the teacher hinted heavily at it. Everyone believed that this was a good student’s manner to give half, never that they were being exploited.

The government gives half of every present it receives from the students. The students believe to be out of courtesy and do not think that they are being exploited.

If a teacher did not have a homeroom class,

the students from other homeroom teachers he or she was close with went to do the teacher's work. The work was assigned randomly by the homeroom teacher. If the teacher said to go, you had to go and work. No questions asked.

I went to the fields many times. The work we did was the same every season; only the location we worked changed. Students in the countryside probably did a lot of fieldwork.

Sometimes the teacher would pick one or two kids to help build a house of an acquaintance. The teacher would also order kids to run errands to the mill when making rice cakes out of rice. We had to do whatever the teacher ordered us to do.”

- **Lee Eun-Jo**

B.5 On Corruption in Schools

“Some teachers traded student positions with cash. Either students with leadership potentials wanted to take those positions, or their parents encouraged them to. In the cities, the positions were sold by 1000 Chinese yuan. It was cheaper in the countryside. Not all teachers made businesses out of student

positions. However, most of them (95%) earned profit through this business. The positions were transected also with various objects such as clothes and shoes.

From the teacher's viewpoint, it was natural for him or her to pay attention to students who supported the teachers financially.

The principal talked with the leader of the farm and told him that the students would help out during the weeding season in autumn. He received a certain amount of the harvest that the students made, but nothing was given to the students in return. There were around 200 students, and they went to the farm everyday for around a month after school in summer. I worked every year during the three years of school. The principal received 10 tons of corn every year, but this prize was not used for running the school but for his own good. Thanks to that, the principal led a comfortable life. He just paid back the teachers with some meals.”

- Lee Eun-Jo

“The parent representative of each class gathered money for the teachers and would say, ‘The teachers are living a hard life. We must gather money for them so that they can

take good care of our children.’ To become a parent representative, one needs money. This is because the child of the parent representative is better taken care of than other students, so parents try to become one for their child. This applies to the child’s grades as well. Even among the teachers, they tell each other, ‘This is the child of the parent representative. Please take good care of him or her.’ Then, the teachers give the student good grades.”

- **Yoon Sul-Mi**

“There was a lot of physical labor, but I didn’t participate in much. About 50% of students (in Pyongyang) in a class, whose family didn’t have much money, power, or connections, were in the Agricultural Labor Support group. One of my friends told me that the only memory he has of school is laboring. Everyone labors starting in elementary school.

Usually each school is given the order to collect a certain amount of a certain object, and the principal divided the quota among the classes. Our school principal was well known as the person who received all of the awards given by the government, and that’s

because she asked the students to gather more objects than needed; for example, when only 1 ton of a certain thing was required, she would end up gathering 3 tons of that object by making the students bring more than they needed to bring. When I asked students at other schools, they only had to bring 500g of the same object, but we had to bring in 2kg of it, so that's how I knew about it.

The teachers thought hitting the students was the only way to get them to wake up. The director for extracurricular activities also did that and hit the children often. And no one could tell the teachers to stop. The parents needed to bring something delicious often for the teacher so their children didn't get hit - the only way to not be physically abused is if the parents bribe the teacher with money or goods. Because the state doesn't do its job properly, it cannot stop an individual's violent tendencies.”

- Kim Yeon-Ri

“The principal had a lot of belly fat and weighed more than 100kg. He was very well off. The mother of a friend of mine was the team leader of the work unit of the farm. I heard from her

that ‘the principal received goods in return for your labor during the summer’. Because it’s not possible to get the job done during the Agricultural Labor Support period, the team leader of the work unit asks the principal for a favor to make the children work more. Then, the students continue to work in farms in the afternoons during the school year. Therefore, the principal received the harvest in autumn.”

- **Yoon Kang-Sook**

“Because my family was affluent, I’ve participated in the Agricultural Labor Support only once. I dug up potatoes.”

- **Kim Sae-Joon**

C. Constitutional Article Comparison

Among the clauses of the North Korean Socialist Constitution, we have tracked when the possible age of employment, free education, and free medical provisions mentioned in this report have been legislated and changed in North Korea.

The relevant provisions are included in the Socialist Constitution at different times and there have been slight modifications; however, the contents of this report have already been codified in North Korean

society for a long time and are supported. The North Korean Socialist Constitution by year was obtained from the Ministry of Unification and Government Legislation.

Selected Articles Concerning the Legal Age to Work

Constitution	Article
1948	No Relevant Articles
1972	<i>Article 29: North Korean citizens are eligible for labor beginning at the <u>age of 16.</u></i>
1992	<i>Article 31: North Korean citizens are eligible for labor beginning at the age of 16, and <u>child labor is forbidden</u></i>
1998, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016	No Additional Articles

Selected Articles Concerning the Right to Free Education

Constitution	Article
1948	<i>Article 18: A citizen has a right to receive an education. Elementary education is a requirement. The nation has the <u>responsibility to provide free education</u> for the child of a citizen who is in poverty. For majority of college and vocational school students, government expenditure is provided. The educational terminology is in Korean.</i>
1972	<i>Article 41: Until a person reaches an eligible age for labor, the person is obligated to 10 years of middle and high school education. The nation provides <u>free education</u> for the student.</i>
1992	<i>Article 47: The nation provides <u>free education</u> for all students and provides scholarship for college and vocational school students</i>
1998, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016	No Additional Articles

Selected Articles Concerning the Right to Free Medical Access

Constitution	Article
1948	<i>Article 17: In the case of a citizen becoming ill due to age or becoming unable to work, social insurance could be applied to receive material aid. <u>This right is protected and insured</u> through medical and material aid enacted by the social insurance system of the national government.</i>
1972	Article 17 changed to Article 48
1992	<i>Article 56: The nation officially develops <u>free general medical treatment</u> and strengthens preventive medicine to protect the lives of the people and enhance the health of the laborers.</i>
1998, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016	No Additional Articles

D. Violations of the UN Conventions

D.1 CRC Articles Pertaining to Children’s Labor⁷⁰

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a

⁷⁰ United Nations, United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, “Covenant on the rights of the Child (CRC),” (1989).

representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
 - (a) To diminish infant and child mortality;
 - (b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;
 - (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;
 - (d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;
 - (e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;
 - (f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.
3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 26

1. States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.
2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.
3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the ed

Article 32

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
 - (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
 - (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Article 36

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

Article 37

States Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and

in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

- (d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

D.2 ICESCR Articles Pertaining to Children’s Labor⁷¹

Article 10

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that:

3. Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work harmful to their morals or health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law. States should also set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law.

Article 11

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.
2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:
 - (a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific

⁷¹ United Nations, United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, “*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*,” (1966).

knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources;

- (b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.

Article 12

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for:
 - (a) The provision for the reduction of the stillbirth-rate and of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child;
 - (b) The improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene;
 - (c) The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases;
 - (d) The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.

Article 13

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree

that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:
 - (b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
 - (c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
 - (e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

PSCORE & Education Program

PSCORE(People for Successful COrean REunification) works to advocate for North Korean human rights and provides education support programs for North Korean refugees

As the only NGO focusing exclusively on North Korean human rights that has received the UN Economic and Social Council(ECOSOC) special consultative status, each year it serves as the representative voice of the North Korean refugees and other North Korean human rights organizations for the United Nations Human Rights Council(UNHRC).

Since 2007, PSCORE has been administering education programs for North Korean refugees. It currently sponsors 1:1 specialized tutoring programs, Wednesday English language programs, cultural activities, and others, and as of 2017, has sponsored over 950 students.

Donation Enquiries

<http://pscore.org/donate>

Beneficiary Account No.: 650-006899-206 (Any currency)

Beneficiary Name: People for Successful COrean REunification

Bank Name: KOREA EXCHANGE BANK / BALSAN BANCH BR.

Unending Toil: Child Labor within North Korea

북한 아동 강제노동 보고서

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452 Yangcheon-ro, Gangseo-gu,
Seoul, Republic of Korea

Phone: +82-2-6497-5035

Website: www.pscore.org

Please contact PSCORE before referencing material from this report.

The Types of North Korean Child Labor Referred to in this Report

Agricultural Labor Support
Children's Initiative
People's Army Support Project
Construction Projects
Construction Site Support Project
Railway Support Project
Caring for School Animals
Environmental Construction Campaign
Hygienic Culture Campaign or
School Management Campaign
Doing Good Work Campaign
Policy Assignment
Mass Games
Ceremonial Parade
Mobilization for Various
Political Events
Atmosphere Creation Project
Performances for Soldiers
Prison Camp Labor
Orphanage Labor
Relief Shelter Labor

" We usually studied in the morning and worked in the afternoon. We did everything they required us to do - farming, construction, digging dirt, gathering human feces (for fertilizing purposes). It was like this all year long."

Kim Ki-Hoon

"I think physical labor takes up about 40% of education, and physical labor of students is explained to the public as a rightful activity."

Kim Sae-Joon

" We went to the Agricultural Labor Support in the afternoon after the morning classes. I remember being thirsty and the work being extremely strenuous. Even in third or fourth grade of elementary school, we worked for the whole day and returned late at night between 9 and 10 pm."

Hwang Soo-Min