Influence of Training Satisfaction on Acculturative Stress and Life Satisfaction: Taekwondo Trainees in the U.S. Army in the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

Objective: This study was conducted to determine the capacity of taekwondo as a leisure activity to reduce the acculturative stress of U.S. soldiers stationed in the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) and to improve their working efficiency. An additional, goal was to determine whether taekwondo was an appropriate activity for the Korean head-start program by investigating its effectiveness in minimizing U.S. soldiers' acculturative stress and maximizing their life satisfaction in South Korea. **Methods:** To achieve those goals, the researchers surveyed 200 U.S. soldiers while they were stationed in South Korea, using convenience sampling. Among the collected questionnaires, the researchers discarded 23 with unusable or corrupted responses, leaving 177 questionnaires for data analysis. To acquire the results, frequency analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and multi-regression analyses were performed using SPSS ver. 23 and AMOS 21.0. **Results:** The results indicate that taekwondo training satisfaction is a negative predictor of acculturative stress and a positive predictor of life satisfaction, and that acculturative stress is a negative predictor of life satisfaction. **Conclusion**: The findings are discussed in light of previous works, along with ways to improve the taekwondo program as a leisure activity to reduce acculturative stress.

Keywords: Taekwondo, leisure, training satisfaction, acculturative stress, life satisfaction, U.S. soldier

I. Introduction

People with different personal backgrounds and goals may tend to move to countries other than those they were born in to experience diverse lifestyles. South Korea, which originally contained only one ethnic group, is not an exception to such movement. Today, South Korea is a multi-cultural society experiencing an annual increase in the number of expats moving to and living there for at least some time. More than 2 million expats currently reside in South Korea, and the number of expats has increased by 9.2 percent annually from 2012 to 2016 (Korea Immigration

Service, 2017). U.S. soldiers have been stationed in South Korea since 1954, when the U.S. army moved into South Korea as a post-war ally of reconstruction and formed the United States Force of Korea (USFK). The United States and South Korea signed a Mutual Defence Treaty in 1953, and it went into effect in 1954 (Korea Ministry of National Defence, n.d.). The U.S. and South Korea have thus been allies for more than 70 years. However, the USFK's prolonged existence in Korea has exacerbated a number of social issues, mostly crime, which triggered an increase in anti-American sentiment among Koreans (Cho, 2013; Han, 2016; Nam, 2013; Whyte, 2015).

Previous studies have argued that low acculturation could lead to higher rates of smoking, drinking, risky sexual relationships, and suicide (Haboush-Deloye, Oliver, Parker, & Billings, 2015; Hunt, Martens, Wang, & Yan, 2016; Jardin, Garey, Sharp, & Zvolensky, 2016; Sa, Seo, Nelson, & Lohrmann, 2013). Moreover, Park and Lim (2000) explained that social stress could lead to criminal behaviour.

The social stress experienced by eexpats could be acculturative stress, which occurs when an individual lives in a society that has a culture that differs meaningfully from their own cultural background. Consequently, migrants experience extreme social and psychological stress (Berry, 1997; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Priorstudies indicate that intense acculturative stress causes psychological diseases such as depression that could be connected to suicidal thinking and behaviour (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 1987). Acculturation not only appears among immigrants or people of other nationalities, it also appears when natives return home after a long time in other cultures. Ryu, Kim and Lee (2016) found that Korean students who had studied abroad experienced acculturation and acculturative stress when they returned to Korea.

Therefore, the U.S. Army has provided a cultural adaptation program called the Korean head-start program which gives U.S. soldiers the opportunity to visit historical places, experience traditional culture, and engage in Korean activities to promote understanding of its culture and society (Kang, 2015; Yoon, 2010).

Several studies have examined the role of leisure activities in immigrant acculturation, and most researchers found that leisure activity is an important, positive predictor of acculturation (Kim, 2000; Kim, 2012; Kim, Park, Malonebeach, & Heo, 2016; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Odom, 2016; Ryu, Kim, & Lee, 2016; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). Studies have indicated that leisure activities provide opportunities to experience and learn new cultures beyond food and language into ordinary social circumstances by forming new social networks with host individuals or other ethnic groups enjoying the same leisure activities. Most leisure study-related scholars have emphasized the effects of physical activities (Kim, Heo, Lee, & Han, 2016; Lee, Sobal, & Frongillo, 2000). Kim et al. (2016) found that immigrants who had higher leisure-time physical activities experienced higher psychological benefits, such as optimism and high life satisfaction.

As stated above, previous works have also described the relationship between leisure and life satisfaction, including an indirect positive correlation between acculturation and life satisfaction (Kim et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2016). In other words, immigrants with higher leisure participation and acculturation would be expected to have higher life satisfaction than those with less leisure participation and acculturation (Kim, 2000). Furthermore, some studies have clarified the relationship between acculturation and life satisfaction (Berry & Hou, 2016; Oh, Kim, & Lee,

2014). Berry and Hou (2016) found that immigrants who used integration strategies had high life satisfaction, even higher than that of host individuals.

Prior studies have already examined the relationships among leisure, acculturation, and life satisfaction, but those studies all examined immigrants. Hence, those results do not necessarily apply to U.S. soldiers because their living conditions differ greatly from those of other immigrants. The adaptation programs of the U.S. Army include taekwondo (Dennis, 2016), a part of Korean culture and also a sport included in the Olympic Games. Each U.S. base has instructors who have taught taekwondo to American soldiers for a long time. Taekwondo training could be an appropriate program to encourage cultural adaptation.

Some studies have shown the usefulness of taekwondo as a leisure activity and as a program for immigrants and other expats to understand Korean manners; for instance, the relationships between authorities and subordinates and among friends (Baik & Lim, 2015; Lee, Jeon, & Ra, 2014). However, no one knows whether the results and theories of previous studies can be applied to U.S. soldiers or if taekwondo is effective. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the value of the taekwondo program as a leisure activity that can promote acculturation and life satisfaction among U.S. soldiers in Korea.

This study examined the relationships among variables and taekwondo as aleisure activity. Findings are provided for related future studies and as data for improving acculturation programs.

2. Method

1) Participants

To recruit U.S. soldiers in Korea, convenience sampling was used at several U.S. bases in the Seoul and Gyeonggi regions. We contacted representative taekwondo instructors at each U.S. base and asked for their cooperation in the survey. The survey was conducted during class, a time not otherwise used for any strategic practice or military training. Participants were given information regarding the study, including an informed consent form and instructions for answering. In total, 200 soldiers participated in the survey. Among the collected surveys, 23 were excluded from the analysis due to incompletion or unusable or corrupted answers; therefore, 177 surveys were used in the analyses.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

variables	categories	sample size	percentage
Gender	Male	134	75.7
	Female	43	24.3
Age (years)	20 and below	52	29.4
	21–25	57	32.2
	26–30	38	21.5
	31–35	16	9
	36 and above	14	7.9
Residence	Seoul	8	4.5
	Pyeongtaek	139	78.5

	Uijeongbu	30	16.9
Level	Colour belt	138	78
	Black belt	39	22
Number of trainings per week	1 time	56	31.6
	2 times	41	23.2
	3 times	32	18.1
	4 times or more	48	27.1
Training length per time	Less than 1 hour	83	46.9
	1 hour – 1hour and 30 minutes	81	45.8
	1 hour and 31 minutes – 2 hours	10	5.6
	More than 2 hours	3	1.7
	Total	177	100

The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1; the number of male participants exceeded that of female participants. Most of the participants were below 30 years of age. Most participants lived in Pyeongtaek rather than Uijeongbu or Seoul. Regarding training, 138 participants were training to become black belts, and the other 39 participants were already black belts, which means they had trained for a few years. In terms of the number of trainings, 31.6% of participants trained once a week, 23.2% trained twice a week, 18.1% trained 3 a week, and the other 27.1% trained 4 or more times per week. Most participants trained for one hour or one and a half hours per training session. Because taekwondo training is part of the adaptation program, people could leave when that training was finished, but they could also remain to review and develop their skills.

2) Measures

(1) Training satisfaction

To measure leisure satisfaction, Bae (2010) and Lee's (2013) Training Satisfaction Scales were used, which originated from Beard and Ragheb's (1980) Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS). The original scale by Beard and Ragheb (1980) consists of 51 questions, and Lee (1992) revised it to 24 questions with consideration for Korean culture. Subsequently, martial arts scholars in Korea revised Lee's (1992) version of the LSS to accommodate the circumstances of martial arts (Ji, 2003; Lee, 2013). To investigate the U.S. soldiers' training satisfaction, we additionally revised the instrument to 17 questions with 4 dimensions (psychological, physical, social, and environmental) through discussions with the taekwondo instructors who teach on U.S. bases, two taekwondo professors, and two Ph.D. students majoring in taekwondo. Five-point Likert-type scales ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree' were used for this analysis.

(2) Acculturative stress

To measure acculturative stress, we revised and used the Acculturative Stress Scale developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1991) and used by Kyung (2010). It originally consisted of 7 dimensions (perceived discrimination, perceived hate, homesickness, fear, culture shock, guilt, and miscellaneous) and a total of 36 questions. After discussions regarding the content validity of the scale with two taekwondo professors, two Ph.D. students, and the taekwondo instructors who teach U.S. soldiers, 16 questions and 4 dimensions (perceived discrimination, homesickness, culture shock, and fear) were used for this survey. Respondents used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree.'

(3) Life satisfaction

To measure life satisfaction, we revised and used the subjective well-being scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), which contains 5 questions. Like the other instruments, it applied a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree.'

3. Analyses

To determine the characteristics of the participants, a frequency analysis was performed. To assess the validity and reliability of the measuring instruments, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. The model fit of the CFA was assessed by non-significant $x2$, RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TLI (NNFI), and the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess convergent reliability. To determine the correlations among the variables, Pearson's r coefficients were calculated. Lastly, to observe the effects and relationships of the variables, multiple regression analyses were performed. Analyses were performed using SPSS Windows ver. 23 and AMOS Windows ver. 21, and the significance level of all results was fixed at $p<.05$.

4. Results

(1) Measurement validity

To verify the validity of the measurement instruments, CFA was conducted using AMOS 21.0. In the results, culture shock (degree of adaptation to new food and cultural values), which is a dimension of acculturative stress, showed negative variance, and two items of perceived discrimination (skin colour and appearance) negatively affected the entire model fit. We assumed that participants' residential and working environments caused those results because U.S. army bases in Korea share similarities with the U.S. environment, such as building designs, foods, and infrastructure (e.g., South China Morning Post, 2017). Consequently, we reassessed the model by eliminating those items. Subsequently, the CFA results produced a model fit with $x2= 860.414$ (p<.001), df = 499, $x2/df$ = 1.724, RMSEA =.064, SRMR=.054, CFI = .925, and TLI = .916. Following the suggestion of Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002), RMSEA, SRMR, CFI and TLI (NNFI)

were used to assess model fit in the following way: satisfactory values of RMSEA and SRMR are less than .08, and TLI (NNFI) and CFI must equal .9 or above. Within that context, the CFA result given above shows a satisfactory model fit. The model's AVE and CR coefficients also fulfil the criteria: AVE>.5, CR>.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Accordingly, the model's overall assessments satisfied the criteria.

Table 2. CFA results

factor	item	unstandardized coefficient	standardized coefficient	std. error	t	α	CR	AVE
psychological	TS5	1	.902					
	TS4	1.018	.931	.049	20.573			
	TS3	1.005	.881	.056	17.849	.942	.950	.792
	TS2	.916	.890	.050	18.292			
	TS1	.692	.777	.050	13.722			
physical	TS14	1	.880					
	TS13	1.091	.859	.070	15.684			
	TS12	1.03	.812	.073	14.105	.936	.933	.735
	TS11	.956	.856	.061	15.588			
	TS10	1.048	.854	.068	15.500			
social	TS9	1	.827					
	TS8	1.136	.926	.070	16.163	.928	.935	.783
	TS7	1.141	.947	.068	16.774			
	TS6	1.047	.858	.074	14.209			
environmental	TS17	1	.865					
	TS16	.994	.928	.060	16.675	.912	.924	.802
	TS15	.957	.853	.065	14.732			
perceived discrimination	AS6	1	.747					
	AS5	.972	.799	.091	10.710			
	AS4	.928	.837	.082	11.266	.901	.931	.694
	AS3	1.052	.825	.095	11.100			
	AS2	.895	.744	.090	9.909			
	AS1	.891	.722	.093	9.586			
homesickness	AS10	1	.614					
	AS9	1.035	.821	.126	8.238	.820	.888	.667
	AS8	.877	.726	.115	7.611			
	AS7	1.079	.829	.130	8.278			
fear	AS16	1	.933			.704	.735	.591
	AS15	.881	.609	.265	3.328			
life satisfaction	LS5	1	.742					
	LS4	1.075	.858	.093	11.554			
	LS3	1.001	.898	.083	12.103	.902	.881	.599
	LS2	.804	.696	.087	9.212			
	LS1	1.092	.851	.095	11.460			

Model-fit: x2= 860.414(p<.001), df = 499, x2/df = 1.724, RMSEA =.064, SRMR=.054, CFI = .925, TLI = .916

Notes: TS = training satisfaction, AS = acculturative stress, LS = life satisfaction, α = Cronbach's α coefficient, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted

(2) Correlation matrix

In the correlation matrix results (Table 3), all variables showed moderate correlation with one another at the $p<.01$ significance level. Their correlations ranged from .230 to .712. The factors correlated with the acculturative stress dimensions showed negative relationships, and the rest showed positive relationships. No correlation coefficient exceeded .8 of the multicollinearity standard.

Table 3. Correlations of all factors

	psych. s	social s	phys. s	environ. s	PD	HS	fear	LS
psych. s	1							
social s	.468[**]	1						
phys. s	.583[**]	.517[**]	1					
environ. s	.563[**]	.531[**]	.503[**]	1				
PD	-.655[**]	-.493[**]	-.606[**]	-.569[**]	1			
HS	-.327[**]	-.462[**]	-.265[**]	-.536[**]	.441[**]	1		
fear	-.646[**]	-.527[**]	-.507[**]	-.637[**]	.639[**]	.617[**]	1	
LS	.675[**]	.525[**]	.552[**]	.519[**]	-.595[**]	-.460[**]	-.712[**]	1

[**]p<.01

Notes: psych. s = psychological satisfaction, social s = social satisfaction, phys. s = physical satisfaction, environ. s = environmental satisfaction, PD = perceived discrimination, HS = homesickness, LS = life satisfaction

(3) Multiple regression analyses

Based on the correlation results, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between training satisfaction, as a predictor of acculturative stress (?), and acculturative stress. As can be seen in Table 4, training satisfaction exerted a significant regression effect on acculturative stress.

In the case of perceived discrimination, the multiple regression model with all predictors of training satisfaction produced F=50.741 ($p<.001$), adjusted R_2=.531. All, the predictors had negative regression weights on perceived discrimination, except for social satisfaction. Thus, taekwondo trainees with higher psychological (β= -.335, $p<.001$), physical (β= -.254, $p<.001$), and environmental (β= -.192, $p<.01$) satisfaction were expected to feel lower perceived discrimination.For homesickness, the model produced F=21.911 ($p<.001$), adjusted R_2=.322. Social satisfaction and environmental satisfaction had negative regression weights on homesickness,indicating that trainees with higher environmental (β= -.432, $p<.001$) and social (β= -.280, $p<.001$) satisfaction were expected to experience less homesickness. Psychological and physical satisfaction had no contribution.

In terms of fear, the model produced F=52.302 ($p<.001$), adjusted R_2=.538. Except for physical satisfaction, the other predictors produced negative regression weights, indicating that trainees with higher psychological (β= -.358, $p<.001$), environmental (β= -.325, $p<.001$), and social (β= -.159, $p<.05$)

satisfaction were expected to have lower levels of fear. Physical satisfaction did not contribute to fear.

Table 4. Multiple regressions on the relationship between training satisfaction and acculturative stress

Variables	Perceived Discrimination			Homesickness			Fear		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
	-.292	-.355	-5.115***	-.012	-.014	-.172	-.309	-.358	-5.205***
Social	-.087	-.093	-1.425	-.258	-.280	-3.571***	-.156	-.159	-2.463*
Physical	-.183	-.254	-3.718***	.074	.105	1.281	-.04	-.053	-.777
Environmental	-.179	-.192	-2.823**	-.395	-.432	-5.289***	-.316	-.325	-4.815***
R^2	.541			.338			.549		
Adj. R^2	.531			.322			.538		
F	50.741***			21.922***			52.302***		

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between acculturative stress and life satisfaction. The multiple regression model with predictors of acculturative stress produced F=67.856 ($p<.001$), adjusted R_2=.533, as shown in Table 5. Fear and perceived discrimination had significant negative regression weights on life satisfaction. Thus, trainees with higher fear (β= -.553, $p<.001$) and perceived discrimination (β= -.235, $p<.01$) were expected to have lower life satisfaction, but homesickness was not a predictor.

Table 5. Multiple regressions on the relationship between acculturative stress and life satisfaction

Variables	Life Satisfaction		
	B	β	t
Perceived Discrimination	-.273	-.235	-3.491**
Homesickness	-.018	-.015	-.235
Fear	-.615	-.553	-7.216***
R^2		.541	
Adj. R^2		.533	
F		67.856***	

*$p<.05$, ***$p<.001$

As shown in Table 6, the multiple regression model regarding the relationship between training satisfaction and life satisfaction produced F=48.750 ($p<.001$), adjusted R_2=.520. Psychological, social, and physical satisfaction all had significant positive regression weights on life satisfaction. Thus, trainees with higher psychological (β= .450, $p<.001$), social (β= .191,

$p<.01$), and physical ($\beta= .144$, $p<.05$) satisfaction would be expected to have higher life satisfaction. Environmental satisfaction was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

Table 6. Multiple regressions on the relationship between training satisfaction and life satisfaction

Variables	Life Satisfaction		
	B	β	t
Psychological	.432	.450	6.423***
Social	.208	.191	2.892**
Physical	.121	.144	2.088*
Environmental	.099	.092	1.332
R^2		.531	
Adj. R^2		.520	
F		48.750***	

*$p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, ***$p<.001$

4. Discussion/Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the relationships among leisure satisfaction, acculturative stress, and life satisfaction. The results indicate that taekwondo training is a negative predictor of acculturative stress and a positive predictor of life satisfaction. In other words, taekwondo training is expected to decrease acculturative stress and increase life satisfaction, a result similar to those of previous studies (Berry & Hou, 2016; Kim, 2000; Kim, 2012; Kim et al., 2016; Kim, Park, et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2000; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Odom, 2016; Oh et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2016; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). In the relationship between training satisfaction and acculturative stress, the predictors of training satisfaction negatively influenced all dimensions of acculturative stress. Among the predictors, environmental satisfaction had the largest effect on acculturative stress. Tirone and Pedlar (2005) stated the important role of leisure in acculturation, providing a place for people to experience the values of their new culture and meet new people. This suggestion could also be applied to U.S. soldiers in Korea, who were sent there from different bases in the U.S. Therefore, taekwondo training could provide a place to get to know other people. In terms of social satisfaction, previous studies have found (Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2014; Ryu et al., 2016; Tangle, 2016) that people who joined leisure activities created social networks that promoted interaction. Moreover, high leisure satisfaction leads to better acculturation and positive life satisfaction in the new society (Ryu et al., 2016; Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2014; Tangle, 2016). Some leisure studies have indicated the importance of physical activities (Kim et al. 2016; Lee et al., 2000). However, in this study, physical satisfaction was not a large predictor of acculturation. The soldiers' work, which involves a heavy physical, emotional and intellectualworkload, could be the reason for this result. In a similar context, Lenneis and Pfister (2017) interviewed female cleaners about participating in leisure time physical activities, but the participants struggled with physical exhaustion from their work and thus chose not to participate in such leisure activities. In addition, soldiers' injuries from military tasks could also prevent them from actively participating in certain leisure activities.

In terms of the relationship between acculturative stress and life satisfaction, our results are again similar to those of previous studies (e.g. Berry & Hou, 2016; Oh, Kim, & Lee, 2014). Among the acculturative stressors, fear and perceived discrimination were negative predictors of life

satisfaction. We assumed two types of fear: of war and of discrimination. First, the Korean War has not ended; rather, it has been in a ceasefire (armistice) stage since 1953. Fear is sensible when real war is possible. Moreover, North Korea's nuclear threats and missile tests increase tension in the Korean peninsula (BBC News, 2017). Therefore, U.S. soldiers in Korea could be psychologically affected by the threat of war. Second, Korea consists of a homogenous ethnic group, and people have strong race monopolism and nationalism (Shin, 2006), even in the present globalized generation. Previous studies have also mentioned racial discrimination in South Korea (Kim, 2010; Tanghe, 2016) immigrants in Korea experience discrimination and limited interaction within Korean society. In addition, Fox and Stallworth (2005) indicated that racial discrimination can lead to negative behaviour in workplaces and decrease working efficiency. However, they also indicated that racial discrimination and bullying occur in workplaces in the U.S. as well. Consequently, the possibility of discrimination among U.S. soldiers cannot be excluded. Homesickness was revealed as an uninfluential predictor of life satisfaction. The residence and working environment of U.S. soldiers could be the cause of this result. The U.S. bases in Korea are built similar to towns in the U.S., and most of the employees aside from soldiers are also U.S. nationals (South China Morning Post, 2017). Thus, few soldiers are likely to experience homesickness.

Similar to the results of previous studies, training satisfaction positively affected life satisfaction. Previous studies stated that participating in leisure and physical activities positively affects life satisfaction (Becchetti, Ricca, & Pelloni, 2012; Kim et al., 2016; Kim, Dattilo, & Heo, 2011; Stenseng & Phelps, 2013). Odom (2016) mentioned that frequent participation in leisure activities reduced depression and increased life satisfaction. In addition, physical activities not only increase life satisfaction, but also provide physical, psychological, and social benefits to the participants (Kim et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2011).

In accordance with Lee et al. (2014) and Baik and Lim's (2015) findings, taekwondo was also effective for U.S. soldiers. The instructors must maintain and improve the program to promote interactions among soldiers, co-workers, and Koreans. One way to interact with Korean citizens through taekwondo could be participating in the World Taekwondo Hanmadang competition, a famous international taekwondo competition usually held in South Korea.

The U.S. army and taekwondo institutions such as the World Taekwondo Federation and Kukkiwon (world taekwondo headquarters) should consider making it possible for U.S. soldiers to participate, taking into account the soldiers' heavy workloads. Otherwise, the program could damage their acculturation and life satisfaction during their service in South Korea through physical exhaustion (Lenneis & Pfister, 2017). Based on our results, we ascertained that taekwondo could be applied to immigrant or expat or study abroad student groups in South Korea. Moreover, combat sports and martial arts in other countries could be used to reduce acculturative stress among immigrant groups.

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