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## The Relationship between Social Capital and Citizen Satisfaction with POLICE: A Comparison between South Korean and American Citizens

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### Abstract

*A survey of social capital and satisfaction with police was collected in two cities—one from the U.S. and one from South Korea. Using the data from the survey of 628 citizens in total, this study discusses the significance and strength of social capital factors in these two countries.*

*In terms of demographic characteristics, participants from the U.S. and Korea were generally comparable. As a result of factor analyses, different factors of social capital emerged. For the U.S., attitudes toward diversity, activity, and life values emerged as significant factors. A relationship between cooperation and neighborhood was only significant for the Korean sample. Participation and safety/trust factors emerged as meaningful in both countries, and these two factors were found to be significant predictors of satisfaction with police for both countries in subsequent regression analyses. Higher levels of activity factors were only associated with greater levels of satisfaction with police in the U.S.*

*Some factors were found to be relevant in both countries, whereas other factors had unique influence on satisfaction with police in each country. Policy makers from both countries should cooperate to develop policies related to commonly relevant factors and to develop unique policies related to other relevant factors. Existing research has rarely taken a multifactorial approach to specifically examine its influence on social capital. Comparison of the relationship in two different countries adds further value to the present study.*

**[Keywords]** Policing, Satisfaction with Police Service, Social Capital, Cross-Country Comparison, International Study of Policing

## 1. Introduction

Efficiency and effectiveness of government services rely on the support from the public. It is critical for a government agency to retain a positive perception as well as continued support from the public. In a recent survey of citizens, approximately 33% and 38% participants in South Korea and America, respectively, answered that they could trust their government, and these levels were lower than the OECD average[1]. As a public institution, effective police agencies are also dependent on citizen perceptions and support.

A positive relationship with the public is associated with greater level of police effectiveness and job satisfaction[2][3][4][5].

Followed by the civil rights movement and protests, the public perception of law enforcement agencies has drawn the attention of researchers. As a result, it is now widely acknowledged that public support and cooperation are necessary to fulfill the goals and objectives of police agencies [6]. Research exploring the relationship between the police and citizens has largely focused on identifying the predictors of higher satisfaction toward public service. Some researchers sought to determine if people of different demographic

backgrounds hold different perceptions about law enforcement[5][6]. Other researchers have focused on the influence of environmental context, such as neighborhoods or communities[3][7][8]. Recent research on citizens and satisfaction with public services has moved beyond the objective characteristics and has begun to examine subjective perception as a determinant of the level of satisfaction[9]. This line of research emphasizes that opinions of community members may be more complicated and individualized by unique perceptions and may not be captured fully by solely looking at objective characteristics. This argument lends support to the claim that subjective perceptions should be incorporated in public service research. On these grounds, the present study examines the perceived level of social capital and its influence on satisfaction with police in two different countries.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Definition of social capital**

Emphasizing a community's role in increasing the performance of schools in West Virginia, Lyda Hanifan (1916) defined social capital while comparing it to financial capital. In the same way as people benefit from the products and conveniences generated with financial resources, social capital can "satisfy social needs which may bear a social potential to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community"[10]. Coleman (1988) provided a more specific definition of social capital using a functional approach. Coleman's definition states that social capital is domain-specific, especially within the domains that involve certain types of actors. Then, social capital consists of multiple sub-factors that may or may not be beneficial to particular actors[11].

More recent discussion regarding social capital can be found in the work of Robert Putnam. Putnam (1993) linked the presence of social capital with a community's ability to elicit collective action and cooperation[12]. Specifically, Putnam (1995) emphasized the role of social organizations (i.e., trust, norm,

networks, and solidarity) in enhancing the cooperative actions and efficiency of social structures[13].

Putnam's conceptualization of social capital is particularly relevant to the present study because he associated social capital with institutional success. In his book, *Making Democracy Work*, the northern governments in Italy manifested higher institutional performance than the southern counterparts, and Putnam (1993: 181) attributed this disparity to higher levels of reciprocity and civic engagement in the north that were expressed through various social structures, such as unions and mutual aid societies. This conceptualization is in line with Nahapiet and Goshal's (1998) definition of social capital as the sum of actual and potential resources available in the social institutions, and the institution-specific portion of social capital is worth further investigation[14].

### **2.2. Measurement of social capital and satisfaction with police**

Measurement of social capital has been a central issue among social scientists. Although Putnam introduced seven main dimensions of social capital (i.e., social trust, political participation, volunteering, civic participation, religious participation, informal social connections, and workplace connections), the measurement of social capital is considered one of the most divergent concepts[15]. Briefly stated, dimensions of social capital discussed in existing literature include cognitive and relational social capital[14], school and educational outcomes[11], democracy and governance[12][16][17], community level crime rates[18][19], and economic development status[20].

Early research exploring citizen perceptions of the police has been criticized for viewing social capital as a one-dimensional construct[21][22]. Inconsistencies in measurement contribute to producing contradictory findings. The present study will utilize a measurement tool that allows for an analysis of both general and specific factors discussed in the sections above. Specifically, the present study will apply the multifactorial approach using the questionnaire developed by

Onyx and Bullen in 2000[23]. They believed that inconsistency in the measurement of social capital was due to abstract and broad definitions of social capital and that a series of different components composed the concept of social capital. Employing their instrument allowed us to examine how the same or different factors of social capital explained variation in citizen satisfaction with police in different communities.

### **2.3. Social capital and satisfaction with police in the United States**

The relationship between social capital and citizen satisfaction has been studied in the frame of public service in the United States. Citizens' satisfaction with local governance was measured as local government efficacy and attachment to the local community as well as the provision of some level and quality of services, and these factors significantly predicted satisfaction[24].

Other researchers paid more specific attention to satisfaction toward police. Skogan (2005) assessed the quality of routine police-citizen encounters and found that police attitudes as well as characteristics of city residents predicted satisfaction level of both citizen-initiated and police-initiated contacts [25]. Churprakobkit and Bartsch (2001) also found police attributes to be important in predicting citizen satisfaction. In addition, professional conduct, friendliness, and crime control/prevention factors were positively correlated with higher levels of satisfaction toward police[26].

### **2.4. Social capital and satisfaction with police in South Korea**

In researches conducted in South Korea, social capital has been largely defined as a resource produced by a group of people that share the same space or environment; in addition, this resource can be potentially used for enhancing productivity, attachment, and participation in group activities[27][28][29][30]. More specifically, Kim (2011) examined the role of social capital and its influence on satisfaction of life. Also, trust and participation were positively related to

the levels of life satisfaction among 300 participants of a community resource mobilization program in Korea[31]. Other dimensions of social capital included "group and network", "trust and solidarity", and "collective action and cooperation." In this study, marital status, income, and community area also appeared as significant in addition to the social capital factors predicting the level of life satisfaction.

Another study conducted by Park and Kim (2012) revealed that among the factors of social capital, trust and involvement contributed the most to the increase in life satisfaction and solidarity[32]. Social capital was measured as a composite of four factors: trust, involvement, network, and rule. The common factors that appeared to be significantly predicting higher level of life satisfaction across studies reviewed here included trust and active participation and involvement[26][27][28][30].

In another study on police performance in South Korea, previous encounters and evaluation of police were positively correlated, while city size, SES, age, and perceptions of corruption were negatively related[33]. In sum, social capital seems to be influential in determining police satisfaction, and citizen's perceptions play a role in this process.

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1. Research questions**

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between social capital and the level of satisfaction toward police performance in the community. The specific research questions that will be asked are as follows:

- 1) What factors constitute social capital among citizens? Are the factors different or similar between the U.S. and Korea?
- 2) The relationship between citizen social capital and satisfaction with police: Is the social capital level in the community positively associated with satisfaction with police in the U.S. and Korea?

3) If there are common factors that constitute social capital, are these factors associated similarly or differently to the levels of satisfaction with police in the U.S. and Korea?

By answering these questions, the proposed study will describe the level of social capital established in the communities in two countries, identify weaker or stronger dimensions of social capital, examine the influence of social capital on satisfaction with police, and suggest theoretical and practical implications to build stronger social capital in communities.

### 3.2. Data and sample

Data were collected in two metropolitan cities—one in South Korea and one in the United States. Both cities are similar in that they are located approximately at the median of the distribution of metropolitan cities in each country. The Korean data were collected from January to June in 2015. Paper and pencil survey instruments were distributed to 350 adult citizens over six months. The survey instrument contained multiple questionnaires that asked questions regarding the level of social capital and satisfaction with police performance as well as demographic information. Participation was voluntary, and participants were asked to self-report their answers. Among the 350 citizens who received the survey, 346 returned their answers; thus, the response rate was 98.8%.

The data from the U.S. were collected from June to October in 2015. Our purpose was to obtain data that were comparable in number and in demographic characteristics. The same survey instruments were distributed. No personal identifiers were collected, and the research protocol was approved by the IRB. 282 respondents out of 300 returned their survey, so the response rate was high (94.0%).

### 3.3. Measures

The questionnaire regarding citizen social capital was retrieved from Onyx and Bullen (2000). Onyx and Bullen (2000) developed a robust scale of social capital based on the definition of social capital established by previous works[23]. The questions were about

multiple areas of social capital, such as feelings of trust and safety, value of life, and participation in the local community. Among 34 items, 31 items were used in the final version of the survey. Items were translated into Korean by two experts who were familiar with both languages. The citizen social capital scale demonstrated reliability in both languages (Korean  $\alpha = .95$ ; American  $\alpha = .82$ ).

The dependent variable was retrieved from Park (2012), in which the level of satisfaction toward police was measured by a subscale of NDSI (Newly Developed Service Index)[34]. NDSI was first developed by Lee and Lee in 2009 to better capture the procedural and consequential aspects of satisfaction toward public services[35]. Park (2012) adopted this scale and restructured the questions to measure satisfaction with police. The original items were in Korean and were therefore translated into English by two experts who were familiar with both languages. The instrument demonstrated reliability in both languages (Korean  $\alpha = .94$ ; American  $\alpha = .94$ ). In addition, demographic information, vocational status, level of education, and age were included as control variables.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Univariate analysis

Samples for Korea and the U.S. consisted of 346 and 282 respondents, respectively <Table 1>. Almost half of the respondents were male in both samples, while the average age of the respondents was slightly higher for the Korean sample (Korea = 38.76 years; U.S. = 29.18 years). Race and ethnicity were measured only in America, since Korea's native ethnic group accounts for approximately 96% of the total population. The majority of American respondents were White and non-Hispanic. The majority of the respondents in both countries were students (Korea = 31.50%; U.S. = 51.77%) who had completed high school (Korea = 83.82%; U.S. = 69.50%).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for Korean and American citizens.

|                   | Korea (n = 346) |       | U.S. (n = 282) |       |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                   | Mean            | SD    | Mean           | SD    |
| Gender (male = 1) | .57             | .50   | .44            | .50   |
| Age               | 38.76           | 13.76 | 29.18          | 12.02 |
|                   | Frequency       | %     | Frequency      | %     |
| Vocational status |                 |       |                |       |
| Employee          | 46              | 13.29 | 53             | 18.79 |
| Public servant    | 10              | 2.89  | 27             | 9.57  |
| Student           | 109             | 31.50 | 146            | 51.77 |
| Self-employed     | 102             | 29.48 | 9              | 3.19  |
| Unemployed        | 79              | 22.83 | 47             | 16.67 |
| Education         |                 |       |                |       |
| High school       | 290             | 83.82 | 196            | 69.50 |
| Some college      | 56              | 16.18 | 86             | 30.50 |
| Race              |                 |       |                |       |
| White             | ---             | ---   | 189            | 67.02 |
| African American  |                 |       | 46             | 16.31 |
| Others            |                 |       | 47             | 16.67 |
| Ethnicity         |                 |       |                |       |
| Hispanic          | ---             | ---   | 30             | 10.64 |
| Non-hispanic      |                 |       | 252            | 89.36 |

## 4.2. Factor analysis

Latent factors of social capital were examined by exploratory factor analyses in SPSS 22.0. For the U.S. sample, five latent factors were extracted using the criteria that the eigenvalue was greater than 1. VARIMAX (orthogonal) rotation was used in order to extract factors that were not correlated to each other.

The first factor consisted of questions asking whether or not the respondent thought that multiculturalism makes life in the area better and whether or not the respondent enjoyed living among people of different lifestyles; thus, this factor was named “tolerance of diversity” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .72$ ). The second factor included items such as picking up rubbish in a public place or being willing to speak out about a common issue in the neighborhood. This factor, “proactivity in a social context”, demonstrated an acceptable reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .73$ ). The next factor, “participation in the local community”, involved

questions asking whether or not the respondent was an active member of a local organization or attended a local community event (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .75$ ). Another dimension was the latent factor “safety and trust.” This factor was related to feelings of being safe walking down the street after dark and being able to agree that most people can be trusted (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .60$ ). Finally, the item “value of life” was treated as an independent factor.

The same steps were taken with the Korean sample. Using the criteria of the eigenvalue exceeding one and VARIMAX rotation produced five uncorrelated latent factors. Among five factors, three factors overlapped with the results of the American sample. “Participation in the local community”, “safety and trust”, and “proactivity in a social context” emerged in the analyses with high reliabilities (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90, .88$ ; the last factor included a single item). Two unique factors, “work connections” and “neighbor-

hood connections”, appeared only for the Korean sample. The former one included questions regarding whether or not the respondents felt as if they were part of a team at work, whereas the latter factor involved items that asking if the respondent would rely on a neighbor for help. Both factors demonstrated high reliabilities (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$  and  $.85$  respectively). In sum, the results provided the answer for the first research question. Five latent factors constituted social factors of each country; three of them were common, and the remaining two were unique to each group.

Common factors were compared by conducting a series of independent sample t tests <table 2>. The means of two factors, “proactivity in a social context” and “safety and trust”, were significantly higher in the U.S. sample ( $t = -7.76, p < .01$ ;  $t = -4.99, p < .01$ ). On average, citizens in America reported to have been more proactive in social contexts and to have felt higher feelings of safety and trust in their neighborhood. In contrast, Korean citizens reported to have more actively participated in the local community ( $t = 13.07, p < .01$ ).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of factors for Korean and American citizens.

|                          | Korea (N=346) |      | U.S. (N= 282) |      | t-test  |
|--------------------------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------|
|                          | Mean          | SD   | Mean          | SD   |         |
| Social capital factors   |               |      |               |      |         |
| Proactivity              | 3.63          | 0.88 | 4.15          | 0.75 | -7.76** |
| Participation            | 4.11          | 0.67 | 3.12          | 1.13 | 13.07** |
| Safety and trust         | 2.79          | 0.92 | 3.14          | 0.83 | -4.99** |
| Value of life            | ---           |      | 2.36          | 1.25 | ---     |
| Neighborhood relations   | 3.64          | 0.88 | ---           |      | ---     |
| Work connections         | 2.70          | 0.84 | ---           |      | ---     |
| Diversity                | ---           |      | 3.68          | 0.88 | ---     |
| Satisfaction with police | 3.12          | 0.58 | 3.58          | 0.68 | -9.10** |

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

### 4.3. Multivariate analysis

Multivariate analyses were used to examine the influence of unique and common factors of social capital on the level of satisfaction with police. <Table 3> displays the results of the multiple regression analyses.

As predicted, the factors of social capital were positively correlated with higher levels of satisfaction for the U.S. sample. American respondents who were more proactive, participated more in the local community, and felt a greater amount of safety and trust were more satisfied with the police. Tolerance to diversity and value of life were not significant predictors of citizen satisfaction. Among the five latent factors that were included in the model for the Korean sample, two factors

appeared statistically significant. However, only one factor, “safety and trust”, was found to be in the predicted direction. The factor “participation” was negatively associated with greater levels of citizen satisfaction. Korean citizens who felt a higher level of safety and trust and participated less in their community reported a higher level of satisfaction. Other factors including “proactivity” and “neighborhood/work connections” did not significantly influence the level of satisfaction.

The three common factors did not appear to have a consistent effect on the satisfaction levels in both samples; an exception is the “safety and trust” factor. Proactivity in the social domain was a significant predictor in the U.S. sample, but it did not show the same effect in the

e Korean sample. Participation in the community had an opposite effect for the two countries: it was positively correlated with the satisfaction level in the U.S., whereas it was negatively associated with satisfaction in Korea. The equality-of-coefficient test indicated that these estimates significantly differed ( $z = 3.96, p < .01$ ). The effects of the other two factors did not significantly differ across groups (proactivity:  $z = 1.56, ns$ ; safety and trust:  $z = 1.14, ns$ ).

Similarities and differences were also found in the effects of the control variables. Significant predictors of citizen satisfaction

included gender and age in the U.S. sample. Male and younger respondents were generally more satisfied with police. In contrast, the level of satisfaction was influenced by age, vocational status, and education level in Korea. In general, older respondents with lower levels of education were more satisfied. The effects of control variables were significantly different across countries (gender:  $z = -2.02, p < .05$ ; age:  $z = -5.01, p < .01$ ; vocational status:  $z = 5.01, p < .01$ ; education level:  $z = 4.77, p < .01$ ).

**Table 3.** Results of multivariate regression analyses of citizen satisfaction on social capital factors and control variables.

|                        | Korea (N=346) |     |         | U.S. (N= 282) |     |         |
|------------------------|---------------|-----|---------|---------------|-----|---------|
|                        | b             | SE  | $\beta$ | b             | SE  | $\beta$ |
| Social capital factors |               |     |         |               |     |         |
| Proactivity            | .04           | .03 | 1.21    | .14           | .05 | 2.53*   |
| Participation          | -.13          | .04 | -3.27** | .08           | .03 | 2.26*   |
| Safety and trust       | .11           | .04 | 3.07**  | .18           | .05 | 3.87**  |
| Value of life          |               | --- |         | -.01          | .03 | -.46    |
| Neighbor relations     | -.07          | .04 | -1.84   |               | --- |         |
| Work connections       | .02           | .04 | .49     |               | --- |         |
| Diversity              |               | --- |         | .05           | .05 | 1.22    |
| Demographic variables  |               |     |         |               |     |         |
| Gender (male =1)       | .05           | .06 | .77     | .24           | .08 | 3.20**  |
| Age                    | .21           | .05 | 4.19**  | -.08          | .03 | -2.76** |
| Vocational status      | -.58          | .10 | -5.58** | -.03          | .03 | -1.03   |
| Education level        | -.84          | .16 | -5.31** | -.06          | .04 | -1.35   |
| R <sup>2</sup>         |               | .17 |         |               | .24 |         |

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

## 5. Discussion

Guided by the suggestion of Onyx and Bullen (1998) to utilize a multifactorial approach, the current study sought to identify the factors of social capital and their association with the levels of citizen satisfaction with police. Such an approach is useful in exploring different dimensions of social capital and different influences of each dimension in various communities. The results answered the first research question. Five latent factors constituted social factors

of each country; three of them were common, and the remaining two were unique to each group. The three common factors largely resemble the dimensions of social capital identified by Narayan and Cassidy (2001)[36]. They listed out dimensions of social capital that had been found to be significantly related to the outcome variables in five previous studies. Among various factors, "trust and membership" was found to be important in almost every study. The next most common factors were "safety", "connection with family and friends", and

“social proactivity”. These dimensions resemble the factors commonly found in both countries in the current study, which are “activity”, “participation”, and “safety and trust.” Finding similar factors in the current study seems to add robustness to the argument that these factors are important across different cultures.

The “safety and trust” factor, in particular, was the strongest predictor in both countries. The factor consisted of questions asking if one’s area had a reputation for being a safe place or if one felt safe walking down the street after dark. Even though the role of police could differ across time and place, improvement of public safety has almost always been considered as an essential job of police. Indeed, a study of police performance and satisfaction found that people thought friendliness, politeness, and helpfulness of police were more closely related to satisfaction than investigative skill and crime prevention; at the same time, people still thought investigative skill and crime prevention were more important than friendliness and politeness[26]. The “safety and trust” factor has also appeared as a significant predictor of police effectiveness[37]. Among the three common factors, “safety and trust” seems to deserve particular attention as it is related to the area that can be improved by police work.

As opposed to the social capital factors, the demographic variables did not show consistent effects across samples. Age was found to be positively related with satisfaction level in the Korean sample. This result is in line with the findings of existing studies in which police are generally seen as restricting personal freedom for younger people and are also seen as providing protection and keeping order for older people, leading to higher satisfaction [33][38][39]. Previous researchers have found an inconsistent effect of gender, race, and income. The effects of these variables often have been rendered less important once other community-related variables were included in subsequent analysis [24][33][38][40]. Our analysis revealed similar results. Gender, vocational status, and

education were significant in both of our samples. Nevertheless, it should be noted that we were not able to determine a racial effect because race was a constant—not a variable—in the Korean sample. Although race was found to be less important compared to neighborhood characteristics and citizen perceptions in several studies, other studies have found the opposite[41][42], and future research should continue to include race in models.

Social capital has drawn substantial attention due to its role in reducing social costs, increasing organizational solidarity, and enhance support and participation of citizen in community. Satisfaction with public service has also received much attention in terms of research and policy. Among various types of public services, satisfaction with police deserves continued attention and efforts related to its analysis and improvement. Higher satisfaction with police has been empirically associated with more willingness to follow the law, decreased recidivism, and willingness to provide assistance to police by actively engaging in neighborhood prevention and crime reporting[25][43]. Given the limited amount of police resources, findings of the present research can provide useful information in determining the roles on which police should focus to increase satisfaction.

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