




# A Study on South Korea's Public Confidence Regarding Its Police Authority

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## Abstract


This paper explores the serious issue of a low public confidence in South Korea's police authority. A low public confidence hinders legitimate law-enforcement activities and weakens the organizational capacity for the maintenance of security. Through a cross-national analysis, this paper reveals an exceptionally low level of public confidence regarding South Korea's police authority and the problematic nature of the public's legal cynicism; furthermore, it is suggested that these factors contribute to the citizens' overall lack of compliance with regulations. Since the country's transition to democracy, South Korea's police authority has implemented different reformatory measures and has strived to earn the public's confidence; however, despite this effort, its goal has not been fully accomplished. This paper examines the recent police-governance reform of England and Wales as a reference point and explores the applicable policies.

**Keywords:** Public confidence, South Korean, Policing, Police authority.

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## 1. Introduction

South Koreans often ignore South Korea's police authority, and the nation's police officers are also less confident with using their powers, even in situations that require the proper and firm actions of law-enforcement officers. Weak law enforcement in South Korea is often cited as a critical impediment to national development. The [Korea National Police Agency \(2011\)](#) presented Korea's ranking of 27, out of 30 OECD countries, in the law-and-order index from 1991 to 2003, and the Agency estimated that South Korea could earn 1 % of additional economic growth if it remained at the average index level for OECD countries.

The low level of law and order is one of the examples that show the low extent of public confidence in South Korea's police authority. Many scholars and police officers agree that citizens' distrust of their police authority is the fundamental reason that leads to a trend whereby both the law and police power are ignored, and it weakens the capability of a police authority to fulfill its own duties for the maintenance of law and order.

Many studies ([Kim et al., 2002](#); [Moon, 2004](#); [Roh and Choo, 2007](#); [Han, 2008](#); [Roh et al., 2013](#)) point out the historical background of South Korea's police authority as the cause of low public confidence. It is widely considered that the "darkest era" of Korean history occurred during the Japanese colonial period between 1910 and 1945. At the time, the Japanese-run police authority in South Korea brutally and violently exercised unlimited power as a tool of colonial exploitation and it was consequently feared by the people. After independence and the Korean War during the beginning of the 1950s, South Korea's police authority played the role of the "maid" of the autocratic regime in support of the illegitimate dictatorship. This role continued up until the late 1980s when the military regime finally receded and democracy arrived in the country. The unfavorable image of the police that developed during the periods of the Japanese occupation and the military autocracy still persists and it continues to adversely affect the levels of public confidence in the police authority ([Roh et al., 2013](#)). In response, the Korean National Police Agency has worked intensively to restore public confidence since the 1990s, a time when democracy was being established in South Korean society.

Against the previously mentioned background, this paper will use internationally comparable data to examine the full extent of the low public confidence and distrust of South Korea's citizens regarding its police authority. The problems and limitations that stem from this situation will then be identified.

Through the remarkable economic development that has been achieved in South Korea, the nation experienced a rapid socio-economic change that has also given rise to many policing problems. The case of South Korea could serve as a precedent for an understanding of the corresponding difficulties and the importance of police-policy development in countries where the transition to an advanced economic democracy has rapidly occurred; however, there are only a few studies regarding South Korean policing problems that have been published abroad, and this paper adds value in this respect.

This study is also the first of its type to carry out an international comparison using the data of the Korea Crime Victim Survey (KCVS) and the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) to study the problem of low confidence in South Korea. The Korean Institute of Criminology, which is a government-sponsored research institute on crime and criminal justice, carried out seven nationwide crime-victimization surveys from 1994 to 2009. The survey conducted in 2000 applied ICVS standards to render the possibility of international comparisons ([Jang, 2000](#)) but a comparative study between the KCVS ([Jang, 2000](#)) and the ICVS ([Van et al., 2000](#)) has not been carried out to date. This study ensures that criminal trends in South Korea and policing differences between South Korea and other countries are analyzed using comparable data from both the ICVS and KCVS.

## 2. The Low Public Confidence in South Korea's Police Authority

### 2.1. Analysis of Crime-Victimization Surveys

This section analyzes the data from the KCVS ([Jang, 2000](#)) and ICVS ([Van et al., 2000](#)) to present the policing-background differences between South Korea and other countries. While several reports on the nationwide victimization surveys in South Korea have been completed, only the KCVS that was carried out by [Jang \(2000\)](#) used the standardized ICVS questionnaire. He followed the UN protocol of restricting the data to only people over 16 years old, and used the same questionnaire as the one suggested by the UN. The sample size in the KCVS 2000, selected according to a multistage stratified-cluster sampling, is 2,043. The KCVS 2000 investigated the victimization related to the following 13 offenses: burglary, attempted burglary, robbery, car theft, theft from cars, car vandalism, motorcycle theft, bicycle theft, personal theft, sexual offenses, assaults/threats, consumer fraud, and corruption ([Jang, 2000](#)).

Unfortunately, the other crime-victimization surveys in South Korea use different types of standards and questionnaires, so they cannot be used in the same way as the ICVS for the purpose of an international comparison. For example, the survey carried out in 2003 divided the crimes into only the following eight categories: personal theft, personal robbery, assault, sexual incidents, theft from cars, car theft, burglary-theft, and burglary-robbery ([Choi et al., 2003](#)).

Before a comparison of the KCVS 2000 and ICVS 2000 proceeds, it is important to note that the KCVS 2000 focuses on the average prevalence rates—the percentages of those aged 16 years or more who experienced a specific crime once or more—over the past five years, whereas the ICVS 2000 focuses on the prevalence rates of only the previous one year.

[Van et al. \(2000\)](#) noted that "the ICVS allows for prevalence-rate estimates for both the calendar year preceding the survey, and for the last five years ... Findings regarding the last year (1999 in the case of the 2000 ICVS) will be the most accurate, because less serious incidents which took place some time ago tend to be forgotten." Fortunately, the KCVS 2000 also provides prevalence rates for the year of 1999 ([Jang, 2000](#)) therefore, in this study, the comparison will be based on the data from 1999, whereby the KCVS 2000 will be used for South Korean data and the ICVS 2000 will be used for the data of other countries.

## 2.2. Comparison of Victimization Rates

As presented in Table 1 the first general finding from the victimization rate is that South Korea shows a very high level of security compared to other countries in the ICVS. Except for the burglary rate that is relatively high (4.7 %), and ranks South Korea in third place after Australia (6.6 %) and England and Wales (5.2 %), other categories of crimes such as robbery, assaults, and threats show almost the lowest victimization rates.

Table-1. Victimization rates (%) in the KCVS 2000 and ICVS 2000

Country	Burglary	Robbery	Assaults & threats
Australia	6.6	1.2	6.4
Belgium	4.1	1.0	4.6
Canada	4.4	0.9	8.5
Catalonia(Spain)	1.9	0.9	2.4
Denmark	4.2	0.7	4.7
England & Wales	5.2	1.2	12.4
Finland	1.2	0.6	6.1
France	2.3	1.1	6.0
Japan	1.8	0.1	0.6
Netherlands	3.6	0.8	5.3
Poland	3.1	1.8	5.4
Portugal	2.5	1.1	2.0
<b>South Korea</b>	4.7	0.3	1.2
Sweden	2.3	0.9	6.5
Switzerland	2.7	0.7	3.9
USA	3.8	0.6	6.5

Sources: South Korean figures from the KCVS 2000 (Jang, 2000) and other countries' figures from the ICVS 2000 (Van et al., 2000)

The high levels of public order and security of South Korea is also confirmed in many other studies. Roh et al. (2013) claimed that South Korea's police authority has maintained a relatively crime-free society for their 2013 paper, Roh et al. compare the crime rates of violent offences between South Korea and the United States, finding that while the homicide rate of the former in 2007 is 2.3 per 100,000, it is 5.6 in the U.S. Similarly, the robbery rate is 9.3 per 100,000 in South Korea, whereas it is 147.6 in the U.S., and the security of South Korea even shows a continually improving trend after the year 2000. Further, Hwang (2009) demonstrated that the victimization rates in South Korea have decreased from the 1990s to the late 2000s, citing the crime-victimization surveys during the same period (see Figure 1).

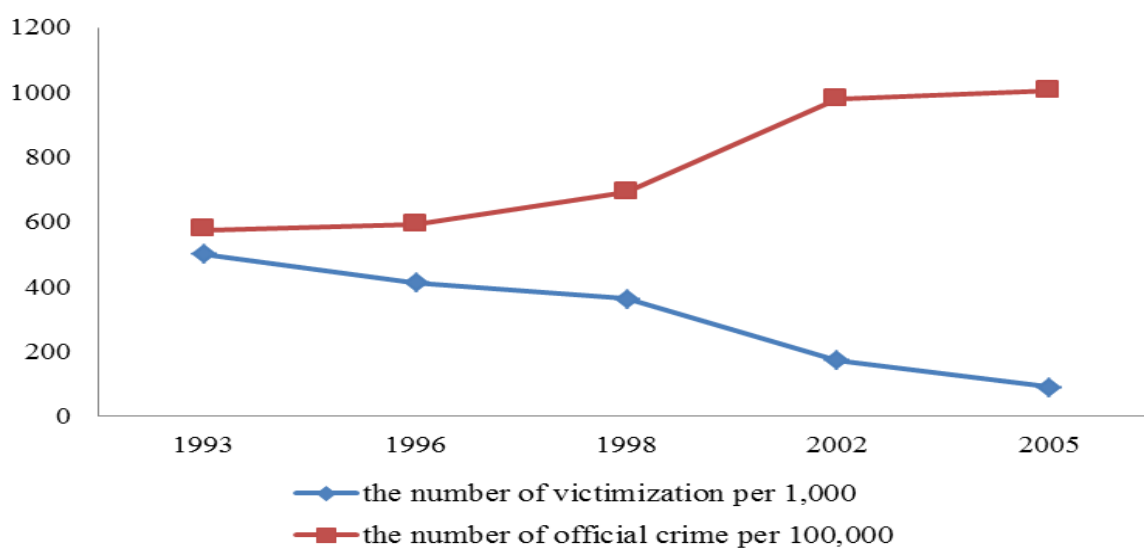


Figure-1. Victimization rates of KCVS and official crime rates

Source: Hwang (2009)

This high level of security is especially exceptional because South Korea has experienced fast economic growth and institutional and cultural changes. In the case of Western, developed countries, sharp increases in the crime rates were observed during the fast industrialization and urbanization processes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When a city grows at a rapid pace, varying types of social problems that are associated with education, public health, and welfare typically emerge, and child labor and crime are not exceptions (Cote, 2002). The corresponding social disorder was so serious that it even led to the invention of the Chicago School of Sociology that attempts to identify certain environmental factors that are linked to criminal behaviour and to specify the relationships among these conditions. Roh et al. (2013) evaluated the stable security of South Korea in the following way.

Korean society did not witness an abrupt increase in crime rates in the midst of urbanization and industrialization. Although the rapid urbanization in the twentieth-century USA was accompanied by many social problems, including high crime rates in urban cities, urbanization and industrialization in South Korea, propelled by the military regime during the 1960s and 1970s, did not cause the same problems, because socio-cultural homogeneity in Korean society functioned as a buffer for the disruptive impact of rapid social changes on social

control mechanisms. In addition, the urbanization of Korean society occurred with an increased growth of the economy, which enabled urban areas to maintain their ability to provide economic resources to immigrants from rural areas, thereby preventing social disorganization.

This evaluation seems ironic in consideration of the lack of respect or value that is accorded to South Korea’s police authority by the people it serves; moreover, this attitude is prevalent despite the high level of security that the authority has successfully achieved.

### 2.3. Official Crime Rates and Satisfaction with Police

As shown in Table 2 the South Korean public’s level of satisfaction and confidence in the police is indicated as very low. The percentage of crimes that have been reported to the police is as low as 21.9 %, and the satisfaction percentage after reporting is even lower at 16.5 %. Further, this problem is highlighted more markedly in a comparison with the other countries in the ICVS 2000, as shown in Table 2 whereby South Korea’s crime-reporting and satisfaction rates are the lowest. These low rates mean that people are much less likely to be reliant on the police authority in South Korea, and that they are less satisfied with the performance of their police officers regardless of the high level of security.

**Table-2.** Percentages of crimes reported to the police and percentages of people satisfied with the police response after reporting

Country	Reporting rates (%)	Satisfaction rate (%)
Denmark	56	77
Catalonia(Spain)	41	75
Finland	41	74
Australia	50	71
Canada	48	71
Sweden	57	71
Netherlands	58	70
Switzerland	52	70
England & Wales	53	66
USA	52	65
Belgium	53	62
France	49	47
Japan	39	45
Poland	40	39
Portugal	36	31
<b>South Korea</b>	21.9	16.8 <sup>1</sup>

Sources: South Korean figures from KCVS 2000 (Jang, 2000) and other countries’ figures from ICVS 2000 (Van Kesteren *et al.*, 2000)

Even though most victims do not report their cases in South Korea, as Tak (2010) claims, a number of studies have still been delivered on the issue. Tak suggested several reasons for why crime victims decided not to notify their victimization to the police, following an examination of 459 theft cases and 247 fraud cases that are recorded in the KCVS 2009. Tak concluded that the victims’ reporting behaviors were affected by the following factors: “lack of seriousness of crime”; “the relationship with the offender”; “the perceived likelihood of victimization in victim’s neighborhood”; and “victim’s age and sex.” His conclusion is consistent with other research studies (Black, 1976; Skogan, 1984; Laub, 1997; Avakame *et al.*, 1999; Hart and Rennison, 2003; Rand and Catalano, 2007; Baumer and Lauristen, 2010) from the same field that were conducted abroad. Judging from Tak (2010) and the prior research studies on the determination factors of crime reporting, it is possible to presume that the low crime-reporting rate is related to a low confidence in a police authority for the reasons that are presented next.

The first and most-relevant factor of a reporting decision is the category of the crime. Victims are more reluctant to make a report when the victimization accompanies personal shame (Baumer and Lauristen, 2010) for example, rape victims are relatively reluctant to a considerable extent to report victimization compared to robbery or theft victims. In cases where the victims avoid reporting out of shame, the avoidance tendency will be strengthened if the victim suspects that secondary victimization could occur after the reporting process during the course of the investigation process. If the victim expects the police to treat him/her in impertinent ways with a lack of consideration regarding their personal rights and sentiments, then the victim will be less likely to report the crime.

Distrust in the police’s capability and fairness also affects the decision regarding whether or not the victimization is reported (Anderson, 2000; Schnebly, 2008; Baumer and Lauristen, 2010; Tak, 2010). In particular, it is generally accepted that ethnic minorities are far more reluctant to report a victimization, because they assume that police officers will treat them unfairly (Anderson, 2000).

Another deciding factor in the reporting-decision process is the social-demographic characteristics of the victim. Many studies (Black, 1976; Avakame *et al.*, 1999; Hart and Rennison, 2003) argue that victims who are white, male, and wealthy are more likely to report a crime since he/she expects that the necessary investigations will proceed as a consequence. Again, these findings are related to the assumption that the victim will decide whether or not to report a victimization based on their degree of trust regarding a police authority. Judging from the previously mentioned findings, it seems fair to conclude that the level of confidence in a police authority affects the reporting rate, and this

<sup>1</sup> The categories of the crimes have been recalculated to incorporate only the following five main crime types from the ICVS satisfaction rate: theft from car, burglary with entry, robbery, assault, and threats.



suspicion is confirmed by one of the surveys in the KCVS 2000. The KCVS 2000 surveyed the reasons that resulted in a victim making a decision not to report a victimization to the police, and found that while 37.7 % of respondents said that it was because the damage that was incurred was not serious, a high level of 23.0 % replied that it was because they did not trust police officers (Jang, 2000). There is also a question in the survey that asks, “do you think the police do a good job in controlling crime in the area?”, and only 37 % of the respondents said “very good” or “fairly good,” whereas 63 % of the respondents provided an unfavorable assessment. Such a low percentage of favorable assessments is almost the lowest level compared with the countries in the ICVS 2000, and is even lower than countries such as Poland and Portugal (see Table 3).

**Table-3.** The percentages of people who think the police do a good job controlling crime

Country	Percentage
USA	89
Canada	87
Australia	76
England & Wales	72
Denmark	71
Finland	70
Switzerland	67
France	65
Belgium	64
Sweden	61
Japan	54
Catalonia(Spain)	53
Netherlands	52
Poland	46
Portugal	45
South Korea	37

Sources: South Korean figure from KCVS 2000 (Jang, 2000) and other countries' figures from ICVS 2000 (Van et al., 2000)

It is therefore evident that South Korea’s police authority is suffering a low extent of public confidence despite the high level of security that it has achieved. As noted in the introduction, a low level of confidence in the police is detrimental to social development since it causes ignorance regarding the public order and police power that can potentially hinder a timely and adequate delivery of public power.

### 3. Consequences of a Low Public Confidence

#### 3.1. The Absence of a Law-Abiding Spirit

A police authority is the most crucial vehicle for the enforcement of the law and order in a society; therefore, weak confidence in the police deteriorates the manner in which a society’s people accept the law. South Koreans often bear unfavorable opinions regarding the fairness of their nation’s laws, and they have weak commitment to the abiding of such laws when the laws are considered inconvenient.

Yi and Lee (2008) surveyed 3,007 South Koreans to ascertain first impressions in response to the word “laws.” The most-frequent expression in their results is “authoritative” (43.6 %), followed by “unfair” (32.6 %); meanwhile, only 14.2 % of the respondents said “fair,” and 8.9 % said “democratic.” The researchers also found that 58.3 % of the respondents believed that South Korea’s laws are not closely adhered to, and 4.6 % stated that the laws are rarely obeyed, meaning that more than 60 % of the respondents believed that South Koreans generally do not adhere to their nation’s laws.

Further, according to the “Survey on law observance and police-order acceptance” that was delivered by the Korea National Police Agency in 2011 (KNPA, 2012) the level of law observance was very low. Out of one hundred points for full observance, the “level of public order” category scored 44.5, “traffic regulations” scored 49.0, “regulations for the process of investigation” is 57.1, “demonstrations regulations” is 48.1, and lastly, “Internet regulations” scored only 38.1.

Kim et al. (2010) argued that one of the main reasons that explain the low extent of law observance is the generous law enforcement of police officers, whereby they used a comparison between the offenders of “public-order regulations” and “traffic regulations” to derive this conclusion. According to their findings, while only 21.3 % of offenders were released with only a caution—the lowest level of punishment that is not accompanied by a physical or financial burden—after traffic-regulation offences were committed, 88 % of the offenders of the public-order regulations were released with a caution. As most of the offenders of public-order regulations are not actually punished, people acquired an impression whereby public-order regulations are merely “suggestions” rather than the laws that they are governed by. While Kim et al. clearly show the correlation between public-law observance and the extent of the customary punishments of the police, causality is not very clear; that is, it is not certain whether the dispensation of a light punishment to the offenders of public-order regulations causes a low extent of law observance, or whether the converse is true. When so many people are skeptical regarding public-order regulations, it is very difficult for police officers to impose harsh punishments, since they are concerned about a backfire effect. Indeed, conflicts arise frequently when police officers try to investigate the offenders of public-order regulations since the offenders resist; however, this resistance is due to the way that public-order regulations are often described in a relatively unclear and arbitrary manner compared to traffic regulations. For example, speeding or signal violations are judged against clear numbers or with technical evidence that is less disputable; meanwhile, public-order

regulations are often described qualitatively, so that they often appear vague to the offenders. The lack of clarity regarding noise-level allowances in public places is another example; as a result, offenders demonstrate resistance when they are punished according to public-order regulations, and this resistance intensifies if the punishment is harsh. If police officers are concerned that offenders will complain and protest during the investigation and punishment processes, they deliberately impose a light punishment to avoid fuss and inconvenience in the future.

A public’s low confidence and distrust in police encourages the resistance of offenders. Those who believe that the police force is not a respectable authority will feel less guilty when they resist a police order; consequently, police power is weakened and a police officer who delivers an operation typically feels intimidated and shirks the responsibilities of legitimate enforcement.

### 3.2. Citizen Violence against Police Officers

In South Korea’s media, the infliction of citizen violence upon police officers is often reported. Some people not only ignore legitimate police orders, but they also sometimes assault and threaten police officers; for example, in September 2012, one criminal defendant was accused of interfering in the enforcement of public affairs due to a resistance against an illegal-parking penalty, and crashed into a police substation with an excavator. During the same month, a drink-driving offender also crashed into a police substation with his car (Kang and Hwang, 2012).

According to the Police Statistical Yearbook 2013 (KNPA, 2014) the annual cases from 2008 to 2013 where public-power operations were interfered with amount to numbers of incidences from 10,000 to 15,000; furthermore, the number of cases where public officers were also injured amounts to 200 to 400 every year (see Table 4).

**Table-4.** The numbers of interferences in public-affair law enforcement

Year	Criminals	Officer injuries
2008	16,226	370
2009	16,673	308
2010	13,360	231
2011	13,052	201
2012	14,389	272
2013	13,407	228

Source: Police Statistical Year Book 2013, (KNPA, 2014)

Roh and Choo (2007) indicate that, although the risk of violence by suspects is regarded as an inevitable element of police work, the level of citizen violence against police officers in South Korea is beyond the typical parameters. To find out the causal mechanisms of assaults by citizens against police officers in South Korea, Roh and Choo (2007) analyzed 189 assault cases against police officers from Busanjin Police Station, which manages 18 police substations, from July 2001 to June 2002. A police substation consists of approximately 25 officers who patrol local areas and respond to security-service calls. The researchers analyzed various circumstantial factors, the motives leading up to the police attacks, and the verbal abuse from the suspects against the police, and they found a number of notable results. First of all, the number of violent cases against police officers that occurred in association with minor offenses, or even without any specific reason, is not small. This differs from the general expectation that violence is likely to arise when the offenders are seriously violent and the officers try physical arrest; in fact, many of the violent cases started from small disputes regarding the fairness of law enforcement. When police officers tried to enforce the law against misdemeanor offences, most of the offenders would not follow the authority of the corresponding officer(s), and asked for their offences to be overlooked; if their demands were not accepted, they then turned into violent offenders. Roh and Choo claim that such violence is an expression of the public’s negative perception of the police in South Korea.

Roh and Choo (2007) also argue that research results on the motives for such violence show a similar implication whereby South Korean people might have a deep-seated distrust of the police authority in their nation, as the majority of assaults (25.9 %) resulted from the motive of “expression of contempt.” This finding differs from the study of Toch (1992) wherein “defense of personal autonomy” is the dominant motive for assaults on police, both at Oakland Police Department and San Francisco Police Department. Roh and Choo claim that this difference could indicate that the unfavorable perceptions of South Koreans regarding their police authority are stronger than those of Americans.

### 3.3. The Collapse of Police Morale

The public’s distrust of their police authority in South Korea has even led to weak support for legitimate police-enforcement operations, and it eventually caused the collapse of police morale. According to the “Job satisfaction survey” regarding 759 occupations during 2010 and 2011 that was undertaken by the Korean Employment Information Service, the ranking of police officers is 571 (KNPA, 2012). This ranking significantly contrasts with other public officers such as judge (93), prosecutor (82), civil servants in the administration (70), prosecution investigation officer (68), and fire department (66). While numerous empirical studies (Wexler and Logan, 1983; White and Marino, 1983; Crank *et al.*, 1995; Kirkcaldy *et al.*, 1995; Brown *et al.*, 1996; Juniper, 1996) have been conducted on the stress factors for police officers in the developed countries, there is a dearth of studies regarding the connection between a perceived lack of public respect and police-officer stress. Morash *et al.* (2008) however, conducted valuable research to understand the police-stress factors that are both common across nations and unique to South Korea including a perceived public disrespect.

Morash *et al.* (2008) identified the following 12 independent variables that might have a considerable influence on police officers’ stress by reviewing previous research on the subject: “sexual harassment”; “invisibility”; “language harassment”; “public disrespect toward police”; “attitudes toward women working outside of the home”;

“ridicule and set-ups”; “superiors’ support”; “expressed feelings”; “changed jobs”; “get others to like me”; “keep written records”; and “stay in a group.” They adapted the items to measure the perceived disrespect of police officers in South Korea from Moon and Maxwell (2004) which introduced a novel method of measuring the relation between a perceived public disrespect of correctional officers and their stress in South Korea. Morash et al. collected questionnaires from 676 police officers and examined the data using an ordinary least-squares analysis. Based on this analysis, they identified the following three main predictors of police officers’ stress in South Korea: The strongest factor of stress is perceived ridicule and set-ups, and to a lesser extent, a lack of support from superiors and perceived public disrespect. Alternatively, in Western countries, harassment regarding racial, ethnic, and gender biases are strong predictors of police stress, whereas ridicule and set-ups is not particularly strong.

Morash et al. (2008) claimed that cultural differences could be the explanation for why particular stress factors were more important in South Korea. The country’s culture values a collectivism that emphasizes harmony, conformity, group cohesion, and interdependence, whereas Western countries value an individual culture wherein the emphasis is on individual rights and independence. According to the research of Hwang (2009) a fear of losing face that is indicated by a fear of ridicule is the highest for the most collectivist country of Singapore, whereas it is the lowest for the individualist country the United States. Morash et al. (2008) also argued that the finding that a perceived public disrespect was a rather significant factor of stress in South Korea is consistent with the “maintaining face” value of its culture. According to the finding of Morash et al. that a perceived lack of public confidence is one of the main factors of police-officer stress, the public’s distrust toward its police authority can therefore seriously undermine police officers’ job satisfaction and motivation.

#### 4. Conclusion

South Korea’s police authority faces many challenges such as the absence of a law-abiding spirit among the public, citizen violence against its police officers, and the low morale of its police force. These challenges not only hinder appropriate and legitimate police operations, but they also jeopardize social security whereby the ultimate victim is the public. As highlighted in a comparison with other countries, the low level of public confidence regarding the police authority of South Korea is exceptionally serious.

As mentioned previously, the low public confidence regarding South Korea’s police authority is due to the negative image of the police from the time of Japanese occupation and military autocracy. Throughout history since that time, Koreans have been distrustful and hostile toward their police authority (Roh et al., 2013).

South Korea’s people continue to perceive their police authority as authoritative and repressive. Given the profoundness of the previously mentioned problematic legacy, it is natural that such an image cannot be ameliorated overnight. After the country made the transition to democracy, the police tried many reformatory actions to shed their unfavorable image and secure political neutrality, and a large number of them contributed to the achievement of some progress; however, they were not enough to fully secure the public’s confidence. It therefore appears that more innovative, steady reformatory efforts are necessary to overcome the police authority’s ongoing, unfavorable legacy in South Korea.

Accordingly, a recent police-reform process in England and Wales bears implications. In 2010, the Coalition Government proposed a direct election process for the appointment of “Police and Crime Commissioners” (PCCs). The first PCC election was held on 15 November 2012 in 41 police-force areas outside London and the elected PCCs assumed office from 22 November 2012. The new PCCs replaced the now-abolished police authorities that had held local police forces to account, ending the tripartite shared-responsibility structure of the Chief Constable, police authority, and Home Secretary. This change of police governance has been described as one of the most significant policing reforms of England and Wales for almost 50 years (Loveday, 2012). The new police governance of England and Wales seeks to regain operational independence of the police in relation to political influence and the public’s trust toward the police, both of which South Korea’s police authority is trying to tackle as main challenges. It is too early to evaluate the reform of England and Wales yet, since it was introduced very recently and is only at an early stage; however, the evaluations since inception are generally favorable.

Applying the case of England and Wales in South Korea is not straightforward, as their fundamental police systems are different; that is, while the local-community police system of England and Wales is decentralized, the South Korean system is far more centralized. In spite of this difference, the ongoing self-governing police-program pilot in Jeju province provides a chance for South Korea’s police authority to test the applicability of the PCC system in South Korea. While more time is needed to establish a municipal police system in South Korea, once a favorable outcome is demonstrated in both the Jeju province and England and Wales, it will be much easier to expand a decentralized police-operation system to other parts of South Korea; of course, a more profound study regarding the differences that exist between England and Wales and South Korea in terms of the police-operation circumstances of both countries will be required before the PCC system is implemented in South Korea. Also, efforts to modify the PCC system of England and Wales that further reflect the corresponding differences will also help to increase the chance of a successful reform process in South Korea in the future.

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