

Perceived Economic Inequality and Individual Violence in South Korea

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Background of Study

- Since the earlier studies, economic inequality has been identified and theorized as the main drive of higher level of criminality in society
 - Merton (1938): Strain Theory
 - Runciman (1966): Relative Deprivation Theory
 - Agnew (1992): General Strain Theory
- Contrary to other diverse perspectives, the Relative Deprivation Theory posits that not *objective status of income inequality* but ***subjective perception of income inequality*** is the main cause of violence
 - GST also presents the effect of "Negative Emotion (psychological perception/cognition)"; however, RDT is different in that it negates the direct effect of objective status

Background of Study

- This position of **Relative Deprivation Theory** is meaningful in that many psychological studies have revealed that objective disadvantageous status in a given environment does not necessarily provoke interpersonal or intergroup hostilities
 - Workers (i.e., House keepers) in wealthier community have lower crime rate (Gartrell, Walker, & Smith, 2002; Leach & Smith, 2006; Seaton et al., 2008),
 - In order that inequality plays a role increasing criminality, it require the cognitive comparison
- **Two important aspects** of Relative Deprivation Theory
 - It theorizes "Individual-level violence" caused by individual status
 - It theorizes "Psychological Cognition" of individual deprivation

Background of Study

- Limitations of Previous Studies on the Effect of Income Inequality
 - Conceptualize mainly **aggregate-level** income inequality
 - Macro-level studies and only limited number of studies on individual-level
 - Examine "Objective Status of Income Inequality" only and rarely address "Subjective Cognition of Inequality"
- The main purpose of this study:
 - Address "individual cognition/perception of income inequality" and its effect on individual violence
 - Comparison between RDT and GST models for the theoretical models
 - Study this topic (the effect of perceived income inequality) in South Korea where it gets worse
 - The seriousness of economic inequality has deepened most rapidly since the year of 2012 in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries
 - The ratio of wealth possession by top ten percent is second highest (next to U.S.)

Relative Deprivation Theory

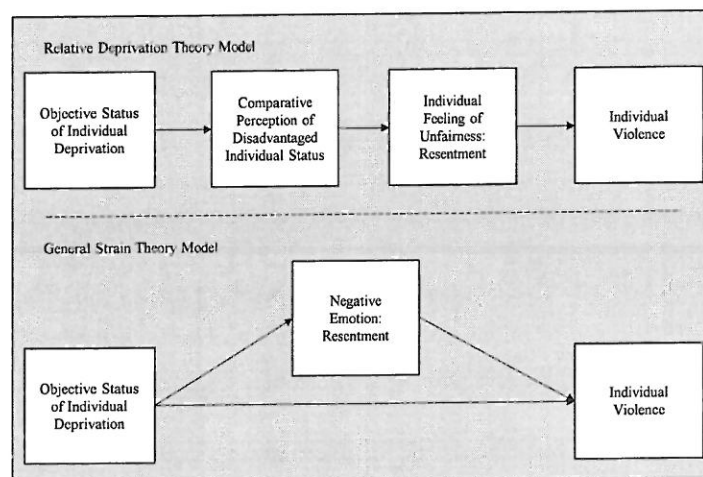
- Relative Deprivation

- A is relatively deprived when (1) he does not have X, (2) he sees some other person or persons, which may include himself at some previous or expected time, as having X (whether or not this is or will be in fact the case), (3) he wants X, (4) he sees it as feasible that he should have X.

- Four Stages of Relative Deprivation

- First: Individual should **appraise his/her status and make comparisons**
- Second: perceive that he/she is under more disadvantaged than *expectation*
- Third: believe that his/her or his/her group's disadvantaged status is unfair
- Fourth: Resentment about unfairness causes interpersonal hostility

Relative Deprivation Theory



Methodology

• Data

- Sample of 2,040 individuals from the pair-matching stratified sampling
 - Select four metropolitan cities out of seven in South Korea and stratified all the boroughs (Primary Sampling Units: PSU) in the selected cities into High and Low income inequality ones.
 - With this pair-matching selection process, a total of twelve boroughs were taken as the final list of PSUs.
 - A total of 170 residents per each selected PSU were randomly selected from these lists.
- Percent of males in the sample was 49.0%, which is slightly lower than that of general Korean population (49.9%)
- The average age of the sample was 47.1, which is higher than that of general Korean population (40.9). We suspected that these differences were originated from (1) relatively lower availability of males during the day and (2) the exclusion of those who were nineteen years old or younger from our study.

Methodology

Table 1. List of PSUs and Inequality, Gender and Age Distributions

Metropolitan City	Borough	PSU Inequality (Average GINI)	Males (%)	Mean Age
Seoul	Jungnang-gu	High (0.34)	49.4	47.79
Seoul	Gangbuk-gu	High (0.32)	48.8	47.44
Seoul	Geumcheon-gu	High (0.33)	50.6	47.75
Seoul	Yangcheon-gu	Low (0.31)	48.8	46.27
Seoul	Gangdong-gu	Low (0.31)	49.4	46.74
Seoul	Seocho-gu	Low (0.26)	47.6	45.99
Busan	Seo-gu	High (0.36)	48.8	50.27
Busan	Dongnae-gu	Low (0.34)	48.2	48.19
Daejeon	Jung-gu	High (0.33)	49.4	47.57
Daejeon	Yuseong-gu	Low (0.30)	50.0	43.71
Gwangju	Dong-gu	High (0.36)	49.4	48.14
Gwangju	Seo-gu	Low (0.33)	47.6	45.35

Measurement

- Individual Violence (IV)
 - Construct four survey items which investigate respondents' psychological inclination to use violence: (1) when someone else makes me mad, I frequently use violence (IV1), (2) sometimes, I lose my temper without any reason (IV2), (3) I feel impetus to beat or hurt others (IV3), and (4) I feel impetus to break down something (IV4).
- Individual Objective Deprivation (IOD)
 - The objective status of each respondent's deprivation is measured by *total household income (IC)*

Measurement

- Individual Perceived Disadvantage (IPD)
 - Three survey items
 - (1) considering your economic status only, which level do you think is the quality of your life placed? (IPD1),
 - (2) considering the statuses of your education, expenditure, residency, and retirement plan, which level do you think is the quality of your life placed? (IPD2),
 - (3) comparing to others, which level do you think is the quality of your life placed? (IPD3)
- Individual Resentment over Disadvantage (IRD)
 - Three survey questions are introduced:
 - (1) I feel resentment about those who have higher economic statuses (IRD1),
 - (2) I feel resentment about those who have higher social statuses (IRD2),
 - (3) I feel resentment about those who have more inherited wealth (IRD3).

Measurement

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N = 2,040)

Variable	Freq.	%	Mean	Std D	Max	Min
Individual Violence						
IV1			2.35	1.04	1	5
IV2			2.29	0.95	1	5
IV3			1.78	0.80	1	5
Individual Objective Deprivation						
Household Income			6.79	2.17	1	11
Individual Perceived Disadvantage						
IPD1			4.88	1.31	1	9
IPD2			5.06	1.28	1	9
IPD3			4.63	1.44	1	9
Individual Resentment						
IRD1			2.41	1.02	1	5
IRD2			2.34	0.89	1	5
IRD3			2.47	1.06	1	5
Control Variable						
Age			47.1	14.5	20	87
Gender (1 = Male)	1,000	49.0				
Education (1 = College or Higher)	1,115	54.7				
Marital Status (1 = Married)	1,519	74.5				

Findings

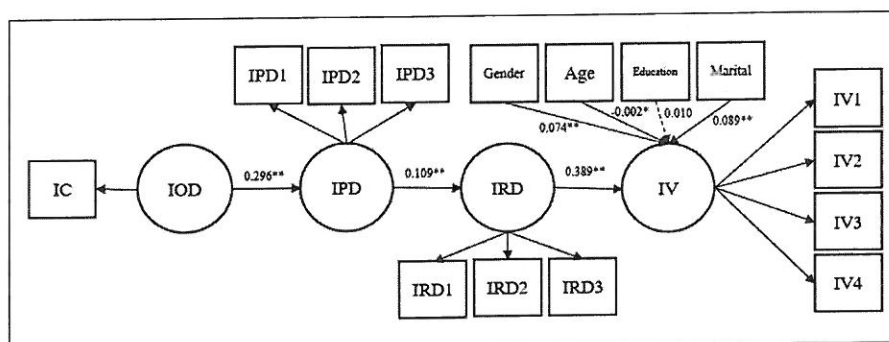


Figure 1. SEM Analysis of Relative Deprivation Path Model. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, Dotted line: not significant at 0.05

Findings

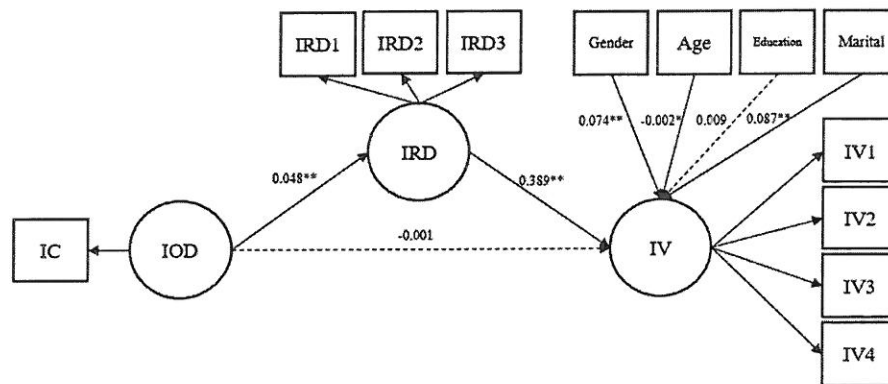


Figure 2. SEM Analysis of Strain Path Model. * $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$, Dotted line: not significant at 0.05

Findings

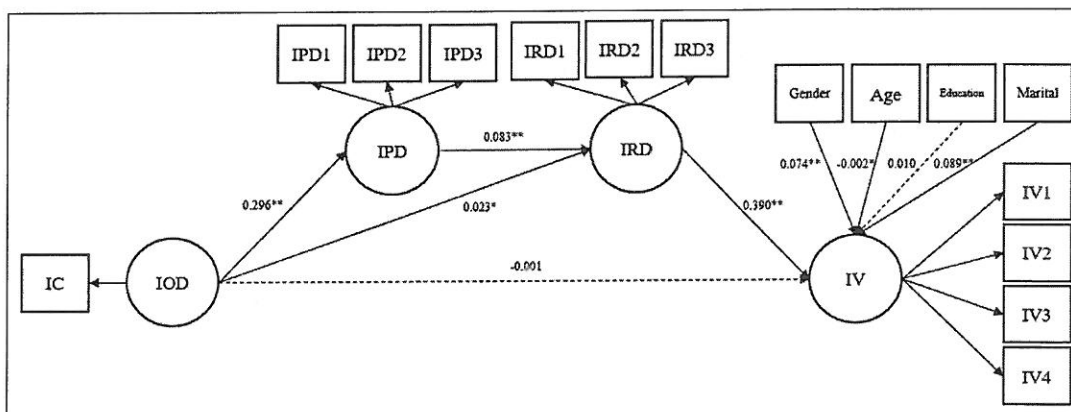


Figure 2. SEM Analysis of Integrative Path Model. * $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$, Dotted line: not significant at 0.05

Findings

- Strong support of Relative Deprivation Theory
 - The objective status of Individual Income Inequality influence individual violence mediating one's cognition and resentment
 - Psychological cognition and emotional reaction are the main drive of individual violence
- No direct effect of Objective Status of Income Inequality
 - The objective status of deprivation or strain does not directly influence individual violence
 - Partial support of General Strain Theory

Discussion

- How people perceive their objective status (unfairness) and how they emotionally react to these unfairness are the main determinants of individual violence
- Public policy targeting on only "objective status" should be limited in terms of reducing violence in South Korea
 - The tendency to spotlight the gap between the rich and the poor in Korean media (with a few celebrated cases) may increase the perception of unfairness and boost up the level of criminality
- It is important to inform people that income inequality does not always mean unfair process/distribution
 - Certain degree of economic inequality is inevitable in human societies

Limitations

- The sample we collect is regionally bounded to four metropolitan cities in South Korea.
- Missing the aggregate-level effect of Perceived Income Inequality
 - One of the distinct aspects of the relative deprivation theory, compared to the strain theory, is that the cognitive perceptions occur at both individual and group levels (Bernburg et al., 2009; Pettigrew, 1991; Smith et al., 2012; Webber, 2007).