



# Factors of fear of crime among Korean citizens: The mediating effect of confidence in the police

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## ABSTRACT

Fear can deteriorate communities and erode the quality of life of residents. Some fear of crime literature argues that the police can be a tool for addressing residents' fear. However, the exact mechanism through which the police affect fear remains unknown. Using data from the 2013 Korean Crime Victim Survey, we examine the potential role that confidence in the police can play in explaining residents' fear of crime. Our findings suggest that confidence in the police mediates the relationship between some traditional indicators (i.e., informal social control) of fear. However, the persistent effects of other variables (i.e., gender) remain after accounting for confidence in the police. We discuss the implications of these findings for theory, future research, and public policy.

## 1. Introduction

While only a small portion of people become victims of serious crime, the number of people who worry about potentially being victimized is much larger (Warr 1993). The anxious feeling about this nebulous potential victimization is referred to as fear of crime. The robust literature has documented the negative consequences of fear on an individual's quality of life and society at large and identified fear as a social concern (Box et al., 1988), deserving of a relatively large body of research that informs practitioners, policymakers, and scholars alike (Carcach et al., 1995; Hale 1996). Early fear of crime research tended to focus on personal experiences and characteristics associated with elevated levels of fear (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2014; Braungart et al., 1980; Garofalo 1979; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Zhao et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the sociological tradition research argues that environmental cues (e.g., disorder; social cohesion) are vital considerations for explaining residents' fear of crime (Gibson et al., 2002; Rountree and Land 1996; Swatt et al., 2013; Yuan and Mcneeley 2017).

Another branch of empirical studies argues that the police, the government agency responsible for addressing crime, should address the issue of the fear of crime (Bennett 1991; Lytle and Randa 2015; Weisburd and Eck 2004). Scholars highlighting police's role in reducing fear of crime suggested the police can influence residents' fear by addressing neighborhood problems, enhancing security, and emboldening feelings of public concern for residents' well-being (Schafer et al., 2003; Skogan 1990; Renauer 2007; Thurman et al., 2001). For example, community-oriented policing is specifically designed to develop and nurture healthy relationships between the police and community members through activities (e.g., Neighborhood Watch or Citizen Patrol), which can make residents feel as

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though the police are looking out for them (Cordner 2010; Schafer et al., 2003). Therefore, when residents feel the police are effectively working to reduce crime and adequately respond to residents' concerns, people feel as though they are well protected (Box et al., 1988). In other words, confidence in the police, which is the judgment of community residents about how well the police are managing crime and quality of life issues, may directly affect residents' feelings of safety (Box et al., 1988; Skogan 2009).

A similar line of studies argue that the fear may not be exclusively and directly influenced by individual and neighborhood factors previously identified by others, but instead, confidence in the police may intercede in the relationships postulated by the other fear of crime models (Alda et al., 2017; Bennett 1991). This mediating effect of confidence in the police on fear may be critical in research on the connection between the confidence in the police and fear, yet only a few empirical studies—of which we are aware—have focused on the potential mediating effect (e.g., Alda et al., 2017; Bennett 1994). Additionally, the theoretical explanations about the mechanism of the mediating role of confidence in the police have been limitedly documented.

Therefore, the current study seeks to address this open empirical question and suggest theoretical and practical implications to fear prevention strategies for the police. Specifically, by producing additional and robust empirical evidence on the mediating role of confidence in the police, this study is expected to support current policy interventions rooted in the community policing philosophy across the world. Furthermore, a more careful theoretical consideration of fear of crime will bring a richer understanding of the factors that affect fear level. It may also be more meaningful to explore multiple relationships by examining the fear of crime in South Korea. South Korea has experienced significant challenges and reforms for the police during the colonization, Korean War, military regimes, and recent democratic administrations, especially with respect to the police force and activities (Moon and Morash 2008). Recently, the police in South Korea have widely adopted a community-oriented policing philosophy to enhance confidence in the police and effectively deal with crime and security issues (Roh et al., 2013). Thus, this study allows us to assess multiple explanations for fear of crime simultaneously. Additionally, we can assess whether the general pattern of findings from Western fear of crime research holds using data from the 2013 Korean Crime Victim Survey (KCVS) and assess the effects of recent interventions in South Korea to increase confidence in the police.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Determinants of fear of crime

Fear of crime has been defined as a complex cognitive description of psychological and social reactions to the perceived risk of victimization (Collins 2016). Numerous studies have explored the determinants of fear of crime from different approaches and generally categorized those indicators into several hypotheses; victimization, vulnerabilities, disorder, and social integration (McGarrell et al., 1997; Taylor and Hale 1986; Zhao et al., 2015).

*Victimization and Vulnerability Hypotheses.* As the fear of crime is described as a feeling of being afraid of crime, the longstanding argument illustrates that fear of crime should be strongly and directly associated with criminal victimization experiences—both direct and vicarious (Zhao et al., 2015). The victimization hypothesis argues that fear of crime is a direct consequence of being victimized, which leads a person to feel they are at an elevated risk of being revictimized (Garofalo 1979; Skogan 1987; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Smith and Hill 1991). Similarly, high crime victimization rates in the neighborhood may elevate residents' levels of fear by augmenting the perceived risk of victimization (Stafford and Galle 1984). Prior research has found inconsistent results, which casts doubt on the direct relationship between victimization and fear of crime (Hale 1996; Hill et al., 1985). For example, some studies found a significant association between prior victimization and fear of crime (Garofalo 1979; Rountree 1998; Russo and Roccato 2010; Sironi and Bonazzi, 2016; Skogan 1987; Warr 1993). However, other studies have found that this effect is either modest or not significant (Baumer 1985; Cook and Fox 2011; Gibson et al., 2002; Hill et al., 1985; McGarrell et al., 1997).

Further, some scholars insist that fear of crime is neither a consequence of actual victimization experiences nor local crime rates or victimization experience of surrounding residents. Instead, they noted that fear for specific demographic groups is inversely related to that groups' risk of victimization (DuBow et al., 1979; Gibson et al., 2002; Lee 1983). Notably, women and the elderly usually report higher levels of fear of victimization even though, in reality, they are empirically less likely to be victimized than men and younger persons respectively (Choi et al., 2019; Covington and Taylor 1991; Lindquist and Duke 1982; Sironi and Bonazzi, 2016; Yin 1982; Zhao et al., 2015).

To explain this anomaly, some scholars argue that residents who view themselves as being unable to protect themselves from crime—or recover after being victimized—due to perceived physical or social vulnerabilities have a higher degree of fear than others (Hale 1996). In particular, the vulnerabilities model suggests the reason for higher levels of fear among women and the elderly stems from being less able to fend off or recover from a victimization experience (Ferraro 1995; Skogan and Maxfield 1981). In this regard, research has examined the levels of fear for various groups in society seen as potentially vulnerable (e.g., elderly, women, financially disadvantaged, and racial/ethnic minorities [Akers et al., 1987; Box et al., 1988; Choi et al., 2019; Cops and Pleysier 2011; May et al., 2010; Sutton and Farrall 2004; Yin 1982]). Research consistently found support for women reporting higher levels of fear than men (Choi et al., 2019; LaGrange and Ferraro 1989; Killias and Clerici 2000; Pain 2001; Sironi and Bonazzi, 2016; Smith and Torstensson 1997; Zhao et al., 2015). However, the link between other vulnerabilities and fear is substantially less clear. Some studies find support for vulnerability perspective with a positive association between age and fear (Braungart et al., 1980; Killias and Clerici 2000) while others find an inverse relationship between the two (Chadee and Ditton 2003; Ferraro and LaGrange 1992; LaGrange and Ferraro 1989; Rader et al., 2012; Tulloch 2000).

Like research from Western contexts, research in South Korea finds that the victimization and vulnerability hypotheses are generally supported by empirical evidence (Brown, 2016; Chang et al., 2011; Choi et al., 2019; Lee 2011). For example, Lee (2011)

found that victimization was a significant predictor of fear, even after controlling for other individual factors. Similarly, [Chang et al. \(2011\)](#) examined the victimization-fear paradox perspective and found that women with fewer victimization experiences have a considerably higher level of fear than their male counterparts. Similarly, [Choi et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the shadow sexual assault hypothesis and found that female respondents are more fearful of sexual assault than males. Therefore, it would seem prudent to include these hypotheses in any study of fear of crime in South Korea.

**Disorder Hypothesis.** Some scholars claim that people experience fear as a product of cues from their surroundings, such as the neighborhood's social and physical ecology ([Perkins and Taylor 2002](#); [Skogan 1990](#)). Specifically, the fear maximizes when the environment is filled with cues that the person is potentially vulnerable to victimization (e.g., graffiti, delinquent youth on corners, and drunkards on the street [[Box et al., 1988](#); [Skogan 1990](#)]). The disorder hypothesis argues that these visible clues of the social or physical disorder can lead residents to feel higher levels of fear ([Covington and Taylor 1991](#); [Taylor and Hale 1986](#)). [Hunter \(1978\)](#) also argued that incivility or disorder signs tell residents that both formal and informal social control in the community has broken down. In this way, incivilities are indicators of both the erosion of community values ([Lewis and Salem 1986](#)) and the decline of social control and cohesion in a neighborhood ([Lewis and Maxfield 1980](#)), both of which may lead a person to express higher levels of fear. A wealth of empirical research demonstrates how disorder and fear are related to one another ([Brunton-Smith 2011](#); [LaGrange et al., 1992](#); [Gibson et al., 2002](#); [Robinson et al., 2003](#); [Skogan 1990](#); [Wyant 2008](#)). For example, [Brunton-Smith \(2011\)](#) examined the causal chain of disorder and crime and found a consistently positive relationship between disorder and fear of crime among juveniles in the U. K. Similarly, [Robinson et al. \(2003\)](#) found out that increasing disorder in neighborhoods augments the fear level of residents.

When it comes to research in South Korea, a handful of studies found consistent evidence with the general explanations identified in the Western countries, generally supporting the argument of the disorder hypothesis ([Cho et al., 2017](#); [Lee 2011](#); [Park and Jang 2013](#)). For instance, [Lee \(2011\)](#) found that when residents perceive more disorder in the neighborhood, they have a higher fear of crime than others. Similarly, [Cho et al. \(2017\)](#) found that the disorder hypothesis is strongly supported when simultaneously explaining the fear of crime with five different hypotheses (i.e., vulnerability, victimization, disorder, social integration, and community policing).

**Social Integration Hypothesis.** The social integration hypothesis suggests that public perceptions regarding the community's ability and social capital to address the neighborhood's crime problem play a critical role in increasing or decreasing fear of crime ([Conklin 1975](#); [Garofalo and Laub 1978](#)). Social integration refers to the residents' sense of belonging or attachment to a community, possibly indicating the level of sharing common community goals and sense of community membership ([Adams and Serpe 2000](#); [Keyes 1998](#)). When residents perceive their neighbors can be trusted, share similar values, and are willing to work together for community problems, individuals believe that neighbors will help when needed, especially regarding safety issues ([Franklin et al., 2008](#); [Hunter and Baumer 1982](#)). Therefore, the feeling of security for residents may be contingent on the degree to which an individual is integrated into their community ([Gibson et al., 2002](#)). The relationship between social integration and fear of crime has been supported by prior studies ([Covington and Taylor 1991](#); [Ferguson and Mindel 2007](#); [Gibson et al., 2002](#); [Hunter and Baumer 1982](#); [Lewis and Salem 1986](#); [Roh et al., 2013](#); [Rountree and Land 1996](#)). For example, [Wilson \(2012\)](#) found that residents with higher levels of social cohesion and more interactions with neighbors are less likely to experience indirect victimization and thus more likely to express lower levels of fear.

In connection with the social integration model, the concept of collective efficacy has emerged as another explanation for communities to influence the fear of crime in the neighborhood. Collective efficacy is defined as the combination of social cohesion among neighbors and their willingness to intervene in community problems to achieve the common good ([Sampson et al., 1997](#)). A growing body of research suggests that higher levels of collective efficacy among residents is negatively related to fear of crime ([Brunton-Smith et al., 2014](#); [Ferguson and Mindel 2007](#); [Gibson et al., 2002](#); [Swatt et al., 2013](#); [Yuan and McNeeley 2017](#)). For instance, [Ferguson and Mindel \(2007\)](#) found that social support, neighborhood satisfaction, and collective efficacy significantly reduced fear of crime.

Findings in South Korea are generally consistent with those from studies conducted in Western settings. For instance, [Kim and Noh \(1998\)](#) reported a significant and negative association of social control indicators with residents' fear. Similarly, [Roh and colleagues \(2012\)](#) found a significant relationship between community cohesion and fear in their study. Specifically, residents living in a neighborhood with greater social cohesion are less likely to perceive higher levels of fear of crime.

## 2.2. Confidence in the police and fear of crime

The confidence in the police model suggests that the police have a role in influencing fear of crime ([Bennett 1994](#); [Roh et al., 2013](#)). Citizens who feel the police are effectively working as guardians promoting public safety have lower fear levels ([Roh et al., 2013](#)). This sentiment stems from residents' beliefs that when social order and formal control are strong, victimization risk is minimized ([Skogan 2009](#)). Therefore, police activity may play a role in explaining the fear of crime by increasing the police visibility, which tells residents there are resources to deal with those things that may cause them to be afraid ([Cordner 1986](#); [Roh et al., 2013](#)).

A significant body of research examined the effects of confidence in the police on the degree of fear of crime ([Collins 2016](#); [Cordner 1986](#); [Lytle and Randa 2015](#); [Scheider et al., 2003](#); [Skogan 2009](#)). The research showed that confidence in the police and fear of crime are closely related. Residents with lower confidence in the police perceive the police as unable to provide proper protection and expect increased risks of victimization and thus higher fear of crime ([McGarrell et al., 1997](#)). Also, [Collins \(2016\)](#) found the consistent fear reduction effects associated with higher levels of confidence in the police. Furthermore, [Skogan \(2009\)](#) found that while there is a reciprocal relationship between confidence in the police and fear of crime, the effect is more substantial for confidence in the police to fear of crime—rather than the other way around.

A limited number of studies have examined the association between confidence in the police and fear of crime and reported mixed findings in Korean contexts ([Cho and Park 2019](#); [Choi et al., 2019](#); [Roh et al., 2013](#)). For example, [Cho and Park \(2019\)](#) found that policing activities focusing on addressing disorder in communities are negatively associated with fear of crime among residents.

Meanwhile, Roh et al. (2013) found that the community-oriented policing and trust in the police do not have any direct—or indirect—effects on fear of crime.

### 2.3. Mediating effects of confidence in the police

There is a significant amount of research about the relationship between confidence in the police and fear of crime. Still, most studies treat confidence in the police as a direct correlate of fear of crime rather than a mediating variable. However, as previous literature highlighted community-oriented policing as a critical factor in addressing residents' fear of crime (e.g., Scheider et al., 2003; Zhao et al., 2002), the neighborhood integrated sources such as social cohesion or informal control may not be sufficient to reduce the resident's fear of crime alone. In contrast, the convergence of formal and informal sources is more likely to help mitigate fear since the police's various efforts to take responsibility for community problems may also augment the belief that the police are part of the community (McGarrell et al., 1997). Further, some scholars argue that confidence in the police mediates the relationship between other factors (e.g., vulnerabilities) and fear rather than playing a direct role itself (Bennett 1994). For example, many fear of crime determinants such as criminal victimization experience or perceptions of disorder, which is considered a failure of police activities, undermine confidence in the police and lead to a higher level of fear.

It has been widely documented that residents rely on various individual experiences and neighborhood conditions in developing confidence in the police as if confidence in the police is an indicator of successful police performance (Jackson and Bradford 2010). When residents perceive better neighborhood environments and have favorable security-related experiences, they are likely to believe that police are functional in communities and possess lower levels of fear of crime (Lytle and Randa 2015). Residents may have a sense of being protected from victimization due to the improved neighborhood environments resulting from police work rather than having a simple sense of being safe to live. Therefore, police activities to improve residents' perception of police have a by-product of reducing fear (Lytle and Randa 2015).

Furthermore, a line of studies found out that the resident's fear of crime is attributed to the resident's perceived levels of confidence rather than actual police activities (Hauser and Kleck 2017; Scheider et al., 2003). For example, Scheider et al. (2003) examined the link between the perception of community policing and satisfaction with police and fear of crime. The results imply the possible path from the perception of community policing to satisfaction with police that eventually leads to less fear of crime. However, the perception of community policing did not show a direct association with the fear of crime. Similarly, the results of a study examining the associations between police strength/productivity and fear of crime indicated that the direct police force is not related to fear of crime. Instead, it is suggested that increasing confidence in the police enhanced by positive contacts with citizens is linked to lower levels of fear of crime (Hauser and Kleck 2017).

From this perspective, one can hypothesize that various determinant of fear of crime affects fear indirectly and may be mediated by confidence in the police in its associations with fear of crime. In other words, the police may play a crucial role in determining the levels of fear of crime among residents by delivering the message that the community is well protected and residents are safe from crime. However, only little is known about the role of confidence in the police as a mediating predictor of fear of crime (e.g., Alda et al., 2017; Bennet 1994). Thus, the purpose of the current study is to test the effects of theoretical factors on fear of crime while assessing the role that confidence in the police plays in explaining fear of crime.

### 2.4. Policing in the South Korean context

One purpose of this study is to provide some comparative insights into the mechanisms for influencing fear of crime, especially from different police systems. The Korean police were established under the centralized national police system. During its relatively short period of modern policing history, the Korean police have gone through various reforms and changes over time.

The Korean police have their roots in the Japanese colonial era and military regimes. During both periods, the Korean police were used primarily to control citizens, which resulted in negative views towards the police by citizens (Moon 2004; Roh and Choo 2007). However, as Korean society became more democratized, Korean police faced calls for its reform and change for the longstanding negative image and policies that considerably focus on traditional police practice (Moon et al., 2005). As a result, Korean police adopted new community policing strategies in the late 1990s to promote a citizen-police partnership and community involvement in police activities. During the Grand Reform in 1999, Korean police tried to respond to the democratic ethos that highlights improved democratic policing by bringing some Western concepts to South Korean policing (e.g., accountability, legitimacy, and community participation; Roh et al., 2013). For instance, the traditional police substation system that has long been considered a source of corruption and community control transitioned its focus to serve as a resource for the community—in line with the community policing ethos (Jang and Hwang 2014). As a part of community policing, Korean police now hold public listening sessions to gather input from the community and explain plans for community building and crime-prevention to take care of people and community values (Roh et al., 2013). Consequently, several successful citizen policing programs have been implemented, including Citizen Crime Prevention Units and Citizen Police Academy (Choi and Lee 2016). From a handful of efforts to change the police's negative image, Korean residents now have higher confidence in the police than before (Jang and Hwang 2014). According to Jang and Kim (2015), the public's confidence in the police increased during the 2000s. This improved level of confidence is primarily attributed to more democratic and community-oriented policing.

## 2.5. Current study

Based on the extant literature, we identify five major models for explaining the fear of crime, including victimization, vulnerability, disorder, social integration, and confidence in the police. According to the victimization model, direct victimization and vicarious victimization experiences may influence a person's fear of crime. Vulnerability speaks to the ability to fend off or recover from a victimization experience, and we include traditional measures of age and gender. The disorder model argues that perceptions of physical/social disorder (or incivilities) lead to elevated levels of fear. The social cohesion model specifically considers the role that social integration may play in explaining a person's level of fear. Finally, we consider confidence in the police. Unlike other models, the confidence in the police may mediate the relationship between other factors and fear of crime.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Data

The current study uses the Korean Crime Victim Survey (KCVS) data conducted in 2013. The survey includes questions about victimization, fear of crime, confidence in the police, and other community issues. The survey is akin to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted in the United States. The survey was administered by the Korean Institute of Criminology and used a multistage stratified sampling design. Specifically, a sample of households was drawn in proportion to each of the country's administrative districts' size. The sampling frame used was the 2010 Korean census national household data, which consists of 306,433 survey districts—of which 630 were randomly selected. On average, ten households from each district were contacted by trained research team members to invite participants to take the survey. If selected households were vacant, they were replaced by a new household in the same district. About 25.4% of the sample was replaced, and the response rate was 94.1%. A total of 13,317 members in 6300 households responded to the survey between May 29 to June 12 in 2013.

### 3.2. Measures

**Dependent Variable.** Like many other issues in criminology, fear of crime has measurement issues that necessitate a clear operationalization of the construct. Because of its non-fixed consensus on accurate measurement, numerous strategies have been utilized to measure multiple dimensions of the concept of fear of crime (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Warr and Stafford 1983). Notably, Warr and Stafford (1983) highlighted the necessity of measuring fear according to specific types of crime. Accordingly, this study's dependent variable is a latent construct developed from eight survey items, combined into a single latent measure of fear of crime ( $\lambda > 0.78$ ,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ). Specifically, respondents were asked how fearful they were about specific types of victimizations.<sup>1</sup> The items include a mix of personal and property crimes (e.g., robbery, assault, and fraud). Responses to these items were not fearful at all, not fearful, neutral, somewhat fearful, and very fearful.

**Independent Variables.** Confidence in the police is also a latent construct comprised of three items asking about the efficiency of police patrolling in the neighborhood, the proper response to the crime reports, and the ability to solve the crime that is reported to police (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) ( $\lambda = 0.66$ ,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

Criminal victimization is measured by responses to questions about individual and household experiences with crime. Respondents were presented with a series of eight yes/no questions that described a broad mix of property and personal crimes. Additionally, to measure indirect victimization experience, respondents were asked whether they have someone close to them who had been victims of these crimes. In the analysis, a single dichotomous variable is used to capture whether respondents have been the victim of any type of crime during the past year (Yes = 1, No = 0). Vicarious victimization is also measured using a dummy coded indicator, asking whether any person close to the respondent was the victim of a crime during the past year (Yes = 1, No = 0). We also capture respondents' perceptions of what neighborhood crime would look like in a year using a five-point Likert scale (1 = considerable decrease in crime to 5 = considerable increase in crime).

Additionally, we control for demographic factors to account for the common effects of the vulnerabilities model. Gender is dichotomized to create a dummy variable for Females, with males serving as the reference category. We also created a dummy variable for those respondents who were elderly (i.e., age 60 or older), with the reference group being those 59 and younger.

Our measure of disorder comprises four items about physical and social disorder in the neighborhood (e.g., abandoned cars or delinquent juveniles in the neighborhood). The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) ( $\lambda > 0.64$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ).

Another neighborhood variable, social cohesion, is captured by how close of a relationship neighbors maintain. Respondents were asked their opinion on the statement "Residents know each other well in your neighborhood," "Neighbors often chat about events in the neighborhood," "Neighbors often help each other," and "Neighbors actively attend meetings or events in the neighborhood." Responses were based on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) ( $\lambda > 0.87$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ). Similarly, informal social control represents how actively neighbors intervene in neighborhood problems. It is measured with two items asking

<sup>1</sup> Notably, a sizable number of studies have pointed out the issues in measuring fear of crime (see Collins 2016; Lane et al., 2014) along with suggestions for distinguishing between general fear and perceived risk. However, given the purpose of this study and the sample of the general public, this study employs the most common strategy to measure fear of crime.



whether neighbors will intervene in an action to stop juvenile bullying in the neighborhood and neighbors will report any crime incidents in the neighborhood to the police (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) ( $\lambda > 0.72$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ). The detailed information about the measurement, indicators of latent variables, and CFA fit information are presented in the Appendix.

### 3.3. Analytic strategy

To examine the potentially mediating effect of a variable, Baron and Kenny (1986) recommended the three-step procedures. The mediated effect is possibly identified when (1) variation in independent variable significantly explain variations in the presumed mediator; (2) when the path from mediator to dependent variable is significantly associated; and (3) when the independent variables that are previously significant become nonsignificant while all the paths to a mediator from independent and from mediator to the dependent variable are controlled. Following the criteria in studies examining the mediation effect, this study first operates the baseline model with all association paths from independent variables to confidence in the police and fear of crime to confirm all the independent variables show significant association with the dependent variable. This baseline model will tell us later how significant the mediating effects are relative to the model without mediating effects. Second, the association between confidence in the police and fear of crime is assessed. Finally, the final model includes all the relationship paths and assesses the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable and the mediating effect of confidence in the police. However, since this study employs structural equation modeling to examine the direct and indirect paths of variables, only the final model is presented in Fig. 1, although we discuss findings from alternative models in the text.

For the study, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to examine the direct and indirect effects of various predictors of fear and confidence in the police. Furthermore, the mediating role of confidence in the police on the effect of major factors on fear of crime is considered. Generally, two steps are taken to develop the model and examine the relationship between variables (Schumacker and Lomax 2004). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to test how well the items measure latent variables. Several fit indices are recommended to consider in determining the model fit, including the Pearson  $\chi^2$  goodness-of-fit index, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR; Hoyle and Panter 1995). The general criterion values for appropriate fit value suggest that a small and nonsignificant  $\chi^2$  value indicates optimal fit, but  $\chi^2$  is sensitive to the number of cases. The CFI and RMSEA are more commonly recommended to find a proper model for analysis. The values higher than 0.95 for the CFI indicate that the tested model provides an adequate fit to the data, as do RMSEA values of less than 0.05 and SRMR less than 0.08 (Hu and Bentler 1999). If the CFA model presents a good model fit, the second analytic step tests the police's structural model for confidence and fear of crime.

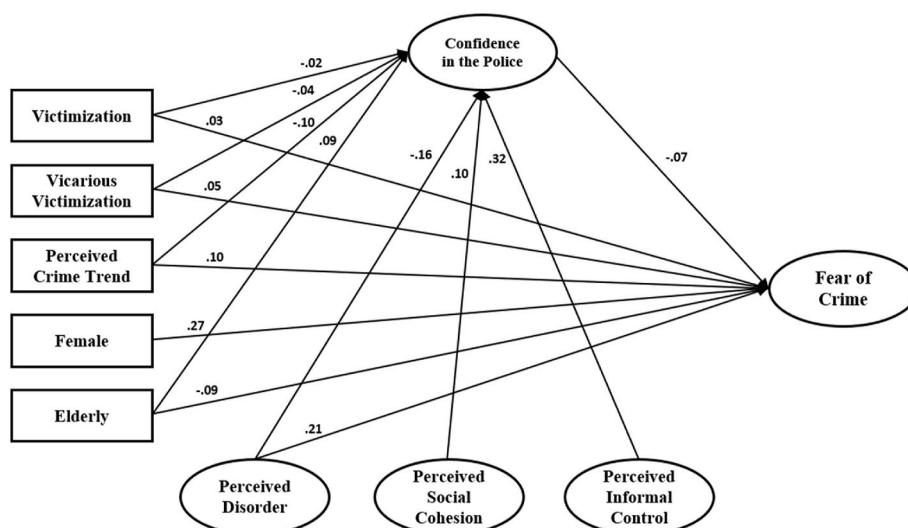
## 4. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for each variable employed in the analysis to show the study population's characteristics. The statistics show that respondents express a low level of fear of crime compared to its median value ( $M = 18.13$ ). For confidence in the police, respondents generally show a higher level of confidence ( $M = 9.54$ ). Approximately four percent of respondents have a direct victimization experience, while about 6 percent of the sample indicate a vicarious victimization experience. About 52% of the sample is female, and 24% of respondents are older than 60 years old, appearing relatively comparable to the national population composition (52% female and 19% elderly). Looking at the neighborhood environments, respondents perceive lower levels of disorder in their communities ( $M = 10.41$ ) while relatively higher informal social control compared to the median value ( $M = 7.27$ ). However, similar to disorder, residents report lower levels of social cohesion between residents ( $M = 10.51$ ).

Next, the measurement model (CFA) is estimated to help assess the validity of the measures. Overall, the model fits the data well,  $\chi^2$  (199) = 3141,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = 0.033; CFI = 0.984; SRMR = 0.002. A model using multiple latent variables seems appropriate to examine the hypothetical relationship between variables in the SEM framework. Each coefficient between latent variables and indicators is presented in the Appendix.

Fig. 1 presents the results of SEM analysis with variables of interests. This model examines direct and indirect paths to fear of crime in the model. The figure exclusively shows those paths that are statistically significant, and standardized coefficient values are presented. The model fit indices indicate that the data fit the model well,  $\chi^2$  (244) = 6255.61,  $p < .01$ ; SRMR = 0.047; RMSEA = 0.043; CFI = 0.965.<sup>2</sup> The results support the victimization (direct,  $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ; vicarious,  $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ; crime trend,  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and disorder ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ) model, but vulnerability (female,  $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ; elderly,  $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and social integration (informal control,  $\beta = -0.005$ ,  $p > .05$ ; social cohesion,  $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p > .05$ ) models are partially able to explain the fear of crime or opposed to the expectation of the study. Social cohesion and informal control which are the components of the social integration model fail to report any significant associations with fear of crime while the vulnerability component elderly shows the conflicting association compared to the theoretical prediction that the elderly possesses more fear compared to the younger generation. When it comes to the influence of mediator, confidence in the police ( $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ) variable presents a significant and negative

<sup>2</sup> To assess errors in the formal theoretical model, the modification indices are examined. As a result, number of specifications of error covariance between indicators of latent variables were provided. In particular, two covariance for disorder, four covariance for social cohesion and covariance between six fear of crime indicators are added to the original model. The specific items that were covaried as well as the value of the covariation coefficient is shown in the Appendix. Those items with the same superscript character were covaried and the resulting estimate and standard error are shown in the notes to the table.



**Fig. 1.** SEM model of mediating effect. Note:  $n = 13,317$ ,  $\chi^2(243) = 6150.90$ ,  $p < .01$ , RMSEA = 0.043, CFI = 0.966 Only significant pathways are presented and nonsignificant relationships are omitted. Standardized coefficient values are presented.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics.

Variable (N = 13,317)	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Fear of Crime	18.13	6.71	8	40
Confidence in the Police	9.54	2.35	3	15
Direct Victimization	0.04	0.19	0	1
Indirect Victimization	0.06	0.24	0	1
Perceived Crime Trend	3.14	0.75	1	5
Female	0.52	0.50	0	1
Elderly	0.24	0.43	0	1
Perceived Disorder	10.41	3.20	4	20
Perceived Social Cohesion	10.51	3.94	4	20
Perceived Informal Control	7.27	1.73	2	10

association with fear of crime.

Put differently, direct and vicarious victimization is positively associated with the fear of crime for respondents. Similarly, there is a positive effect of perceived neighborhood crime trends on fear of crime, as expected by the victimization model's argument that individuals with direct or vicarious victimization experience have more fear of crime. Similarly, when residents perceive crime is serious or increasing in neighborhoods, they are more likely to hold higher levels of crime. For the vulnerability model, females express higher fear levels than males, while the elderly express lower levels of fear than the non-elderly. As expected, disorder also exerts a positive effect on fear of crime. The importance of addressing disorder in the neighborhood is highlighted again here. Surprisingly, social cohesion and informal social control do not have a significant effect on fear, contrary to most prior research. Lastly, confidence in the police is negatively related to fear of crime, supporting the hypothetical argument that higher levels of confidence in the police lead to reduced levels of fear.

Next, we examine the effect of the independent variables on confidence in the police. All variables in the model, except for being female, have a significant impact on confidence in the police. As previous studies reported, direct ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vicarious victimization experience ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ), perceived crime trend ( $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and disorder ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) have a negative influence on confidence in the police. Meanwhile, social cohesion ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ), informal control ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and elderly ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ) have positive effects on confidence in the police. These findings are consistent with the findings from prior studies.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, to assess the mediating effect of confidence in the police, the indirect effects of variables are calculated. The indirect or mediated effects are generally calculated using the Sobel test (Sobel 1982) designed to test the significance of mediating effects based on the standard error of coefficients of paths between independent and mediator and mediator and dependent variable. However, this

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, informal control showed a significant effect on fear of crime in a model without a path from confidence in the police to fear of crime but no direct and significant effect on fear is reported in Fig. 1. This would suggest that the effect of informal control on fear of crime is completely mediated through confidence in the police.

approach suffers from the major limitation of not having a normal distribution of the standard errors (Hayes et al., 2011). Thus, it may be inaccurate since, generally, the distribution of standard errors is not normal, leading to biased inferences (Zhao et al., 2010). Alternately, Preacher and Hayes (2004) recommended employing a repeated sampling method to relax the dependency on the standard error of a single sample and estimate a more accurate confidence interval by using a bootstrapping method. As a result, if the confidence interval includes zero, we would fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no indirect effect (Zhao et al., 2010).

The results of the tests are presented in Table 2. As Table 2 illustrates, all variables except for females are statistically significant in having indirect effects on fear of crime through police confidence. The female variable reports that the confidence interval for females' mediating effects includes zero, which implies a nonsignificant indirect effect. Regarding indirect effects, confidence in the police mediates around 10% of the victimization and vulnerabilities models' effect. However, the social integration model variables such as social cohesion and informal control are considerably mediated by police confidence. On average, more than 55% of their effects are mediated by the confidence in the police. The perceived level of social cohesion and informal control reduces residents' fear level but mostly through their confidence in the police. More interestingly, the effect of disorder, with only an eight percent reduction in the effect, is slightly mediated by confidence in the police.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

In modern society, the police are expected to address various social problems, including fear of crime. Also, the links between public confidence in the police and fear of crime lead to more feasible and practical strategies to enhance feelings of security in society (Bennett 1994). This research examined the effects of theoretical factors of fear of crime and the mediating role of confidence in the police on fear by using the Korean Crime Victim Survey (KCVS) data. Several findings bring more insightful understanding to fear of crime literature.

First, findings of the study suggest that the victimization and the disorder models are both fully supported. However, the vulnerability and social integration models are—at best—partially supported by the results. Consistent with the victimization model, people with direct and vicarious victimization experiences have higher levels of fear. Similarly, a perceived sign of disorder in neighborhoods appealed strongly related to increasing fear of crime. When residents observe delinquent juveniles or trash on the street in neighborhoods, they are more likely to express higher levels of fear. This also implies that we can more effectively reduce the fear of crime by addressing environmental conditions and addressing social disorder problems (e.g., providing the homeless and drunken people with proper social welfare).

The vulnerability model presented mixed results. Females who are generally not considered as prone to criminal victimization express higher levels of fear. However, the elderly expressed lower levels of fear, which is inconsistent with prior research (Braungart et al., 1980; Killias and Clerici 2000). This finding is not necessarily surprising in the context of Korean culture. Under Confucianism, which still plays a large role in shaping Korean culture, people believe the elderly deserve respect and special protection. This mentality is not as widely shared, or at least to the same degree, in Western nations (Lee et al., 2011). In sum, the results indicate that non-elderly persons and females are more fearful of being victimized than the elderly or male population in South Korea. Therefore, policies specifically designed to address female safety (e.g., the Service for Safe Return Home of Women) provided by local governments at night in Korea seem compelling to address the fear problem among residents. The Seoul Metropolitan Government launched a service for women to ensure safety and reduce the fear of crime on the way home from public transportations or the city's main streets at night in 2013. When a woman calls for the service, agencies deploy the guardians who wear bright uniforms, and they accompany and guide the citizen home (Kang 2018). In sum, fear of crime can be reduced by preventing crime or decreasing crime rates in neighborhoods. Additionally, the non-elderly and females hold higher levels of fear of crime, presumably due to the perceived vulnerability.

Most surprisingly, the social integration model, especially social cohesion, which has been widely supported in prior research, yielded a curious finding. People residing in a neighborhood where residents know each other and have close relationships have a higher fear of crime. However, the influence is not significant. A line of studies pointed out the feedback loop for the insignificant association of social cohesion with fear of crime, especially in social disorganization literature (Liska and Bellair 1995; Markowitz et al., 2001; Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). They argued that fear of crime also influences neighborhood cohesion and vice-versa,

**Table 2**  
Preacher and Hayes mediation test results.

Variable	Bootstrapped coefficient	Confidence Interval (L. L.)	Confidence Interval (U. L.)	Total Effect	Proportion of effect mediated
Direct Victimization	.3150***	0.2084	0.4261	2.638	0.1193
Indirect Victimization	.3240***	0.2386	0.414	2.522	0.1284
Perceived Crime Trend	.2125***	0.1759	0.2511	1.616	0.1314
Female	0.0067	−0.0293	0.0428	3.503	0.0019
Elderly	−.4392***	−0.5115	−0.3691	−2.286	0.1921
Perceived Disorder	.0503***	0.0386	0.0619	0.6152	0.0817
Perceived Social Cohesion	−.0796***	−0.0912	−0.0685	−0.1428	0.5572
Perceived Informal Control	−.1926***	−0.2203	−0.1661	−0.2923	0.6589

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



and not considering this effect in analyses may yield biased estimates of the effects of neighborhood cohesion (Markowitz et al., 2001). This finding may also be attributed to South Korea's unique residential structure. The traditional and strong community cohesion is often observed in rural areas or underdeveloped residential areas characterized by low-income households living in old apartments or multiplex houses (Roh et al., 2012). These areas often struggle with disorders and lack of resources to address social issues such as crime, resulting in higher levels of fear. For the relationship between confidence in the police and fear of crime, the results indicate that people who have higher confidence in the police are likely to have less fear of crime.

In sum, the fear of crime among residents is highly related to confidence in the police. Therefore, when police give the image to residents that they are working close and properly react to residents' needs, the public has less fear of crime. As Roh and colleagues (2012) noted, Korean police need to introduce more practical initiatives to involve community members in their activities and nurture the relationship with communities to enhance residents' level of confidence.

Second, this study revealed a mediating role of confidence in the police for fear of crime. Various components of fear of crime models showed significant effects on confidence in the police, and confidence in the police influenced fear of crime. However, informal social control became nonsignificant after accounting for the mediating role of confidence in the police. In a further analysis to assess these indirect influences, all the variables apart from females showed a significant indirect influence on fear of crime. The informal control variable, in particular, showed the greatest proportion of effect that is mediated by confidence in the police. At first glance, this result seems odd since informal control is a willingness or ability among community members to intervene in social problems (see Sampson et al., 1997), while confidence in the police is represented by legitimacy or functional formal control over crime that looks separate from informal control. However, as the expressive perspective argues the informal control is well associated with confidence in the police; people look to the police to maintain social order by protecting structured and moral norms of the community such as social cohesion or informal control. Further, the results of the study also indicate that the link between informal control and confidence in the police will indirectly lead to lower levels of fear among residents.

Again, these results imply that confidence in the police plays a very important mediating role for social integration variables compared to neighborhood conditions that directly influence the residents' fear of crime. These results support the main hypothesis of the study, "confidence in the police plays as a mediating factor on fear of crime." Thus, we argue that fear of crime will be best addressed through successful police work to directly reduce crime and enhance the quality of life, which will yield effects on other fear-inducing activities. Therefore, the police need to make greater efforts to enhance public trust in the police. This focus can have both desirable proximal (e.g., enhanced perceptions of legitimacy) and distal (e.g., reduced fear of crime) outcomes. In particular, various community-based policing strategies and democratic department policies are one recommendation. For example, Cho and Park (2019) examined the effects of disorder policing on fear of crime in Seoul. They argued that more discretionary policing focusing on neighborhood problems such as disorder would effectively reduce the sense of fear among residents. Also, Weisburd and Eck (2004) argued that community policing practices, in general, seem to reduce the fear of crime. However, the evidence is not consistent when these practices are implemented without specific strategies (e.g., problem-oriented policing). Therefore, police executives should invest time and resources to evaluate and address community problems. Further, this should be done in such a way that encourages officers to build positive and healthy relationships with the community (Skogan 2009).

Despite the findings of this study, the conclusions should be seen in light of the limitations of the current research. First, this study utilized cross-sectional data, which was collected in 2013, which limits our ability to test the full causal nature of the fear of crime models. Similarly, some theoretical arguments underline the reciprocal relationship between confidence in the police and fear of crime or the path from fear of crime to confidence in the police. For instance, the instrumental model argues that fear of victimization undermines the public's confidence in the police. After all, these residents may feel the police are ineffective social control agents (Jang and Hwang 2014). Therefore, without preserving the time order between variables, we cannot justify the real causation between these variables. However, based on the previous literature, we very carefully assume that confidence in the police has a stronger influence on fear of crime than the other way around (Skogan 2009).

Second, the theoretical logic on the mediating effects is still developing. Thus, study expands the theoretical argument for the mediating effect of confidence in the police, although unanswered questions remain. However, there still needs more concrete theoretical development for how confidence in the police mediates the associations between exogenous factors and fear of crime. Future studies should add evidence and develop the theoretical notion of the mediating role of confidence in the police.

In summary, this study identifies the contribution that confidence in the police can play in reducing fear of crime in South Korea. Given the current emphasis on community-oriented policing in South-Korea, the study's findings are expected to bring clear and practical policy implications. Specifically, the results suggest the importance of the police building positive relationships with community residents to promote greater social cohesion and informal social control while simultaneously addressing quality of life issues. These strategies may be exceptionally important in modern South Korea, given the growing trend of people interacting less with their neighbors and being generally more reluctant to engage in community activities. The police may be a viable mechanism for residents rather than dealing with crime and quality of life issues by themselves. In this case, confidence in the police may play a substantial role in decreasing fear among residents. This is especially true if individuals in neighborhoods perceive the police to be working well to provide reasonable protection and address community problems. Thus, the importance of community-oriented policing, which gives a more visible and positive image to the residents, is reemphasized. Police can work to enhance confidence in the police through building environments in which residents voluntarily become involved, and as a result, fear of crime is reduced.

## Appendix

Standardized factor loading coefficients from the confirmatory factor analysis.

Latent variable	Indicators	$\beta$	M	SD	Range	$\alpha$
Fear of Crime	Someone may steal my money or valuables <sup>A,B,C</sup>	0.835	2.31	0.97	1–5	.942
	Someone may take my money or valuables by force <sup>A,D,E,F,G,H,I</sup>	0.855	2.25	0.95	1–5	
	Someone may beat or assault me <sup>D</sup>	0.874	2.31	0.98	1–5	
	Having your property lost by fraud <sup>E,J,K</sup>	0.822	2.30	0.98	1–5	
	Being sexually assaulted by someone <sup>B,F,J,L</sup>	0.780	2.15	1.07	1–5	
	Having your valuables damaged or broken <sup>G,K,M,N</sup>	0.833	2.21	0.95	1–5	
	Having somebody break into your home <sup>H,M,O</sup>	0.787	2.50	1.10	1–5	
Confidence in the Police	Having somebody stalk me <sup>C,I,L,N,O</sup>	0.784	2.09	0.95	1–5	.796
	The police are doing well in patrolling the community	0.663	3.10	0.97	1–5	
	It seems that the police are quick and proper in handling a crime report by a citizen	0.833	3.40	0.91	1–5	
Perceived Disorder	It seems that the police are efficient in arresting a criminal when crime is reported.	0.701	3.05	0.92	1–5	.764
	My neighborhood is dirty with rubbish <sup>P,Q</sup>	0.724	2.58	1.05	1–5	
	There are many dark and ignored places <sup>R,S</sup>	0.799	2.70	1.07	1–5	
	There are many people breaking basic orders (ex. jaywalking, illegal parking) <sup>P,R,T</sup>	0.659	2.72	1.04	1–5	
Perceived Social Cohesion	I often see groups of delinquent juveniles wandering around <sup>Q,S,T</sup>	0.778	2.41	1.02	1–5	.908
	Residents in my neighborhood know about each other <sup>U,V,W</sup>	0.854	2.90	1.13	1–5	
	Residents in my neighborhood talk about community issues <sup>U</sup>	0.807	2.53	1.10	1–5	
	Residents in my neighborhood help each other with difficulties <sup>V,X</sup>	0.910	2.71	1.09	1–5	
Perceived Informal Control	Residents in my neighborhood go to community events and meetings <sup>W,X</sup>	0.906	2.37	1.13	1–5	.760
	Neighbors will be in an action to stop juvenile bullying in neighborhood	0.854	3.45	0.99	1–5	
	Neighbors will report any crime incidents in neighborhood to police	0.720	3.82	0.93	1–5	

Note.  $\chi^2(243) = 6255.61$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $SRMR = 0.047$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.043$ ;  $CFI = 0.965$ , <sup>A</sup> = 0.49 (0.01); <sup>B</sup> = -0.24 (0.01); <sup>C</sup> = -0.09 (0.01); <sup>D</sup> = 0.27 (0.02); <sup>E</sup> = 0.08 (0.01); <sup>F</sup> = -0.08 (0.02); <sup>G</sup> = 0.10 (0.01); <sup>H</sup> = 0.03 (0.01); <sup>I</sup> = 0.06 (0.01); <sup>J</sup> = -0.16 (0.01); <sup>K</sup> = 0.12 (0.01); <sup>L</sup> = 0.16 (0.01); <sup>M</sup> = 0.16 (0.01); <sup>N</sup> = 0.19 (0.01); <sup>O</sup> = 0.11 (0.01); <sup>P</sup> = -0.31 (0.05); <sup>Q</sup> = -3.06 (5.45); <sup>R</sup> = -1.02 (0.15); <sup>S</sup> = -7.08 (12.71); <sup>T</sup> = -5.10 (9.5); <sup>U</sup> = 0.21 (0.02); <sup>V</sup> = -0.55 (0.12); <sup>W</sup> = -0.57 (0.07); <sup>X</sup> = -0.73 (0.13).

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