

Articles

# The Impact of Socio-Economic Position on Perceived Oppression: Using Social Support as a Mediator

Nakyung Lee <sup>a</sup>, Tobin Im <sup>b</sup>

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Within the continuing economic downturn, our society has been facing rapid dichotomization and bi-polarization between groups which reinforces social inequality. Young (2011) states that social inequality should be viewed as a concept of oppression, not by the distribution of resources, which has been considered as a general indicator of social inequality. Following her argument, she suggests exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence as sub-concepts of oppression. In this sense, this study uses the distribution of resources as an independent variable and the 'perceived oppression' presented by Young as a dependent variable to identify the role of social support as a factor that makes the difference between social-structural inequality and contextual inequality. Through hierarchical regression analyses and bootstrapping methods this paper looks at how the two different perspectives on inequality are related, and how the social support mediates the relationship between socio-economic position and perceived oppression. By shedding light on the meaning of socio-economic isolation of individuals, this study will contribute to the academia in searching for the alternatives to strengthen the stability of our society where the new paradigm of communication is being used to form network ties and corresponding sense of supports.

## WHAT FORMS ONE'S OWN WORLD

Everyone lives in their own world. People live in their own thoughts, their own rules, and their own interpretations on the phenomena taking place around themselves. It has often been suggested that the mechanism that broadens people's own world is social interaction. Cooley (1972) introduces the concept of 'looking-glass self', meaning individuals build their eyes on themselves and the world through social relationships. This paper examines whether there is a difference between the social-structural oppression and the subjective oppression perceived by the individual, then explores what drives the difference between those two. Starting from these questions, this paper examines how the social relationship affects individual's perceived oppression in the face of economic crisis, structural inequality, and socio-economic isolation.

Individual's socio-economic position imposes different degrees of social structural constraints on each individual, which also affects the breadth of relationships and networks that individuals can contact. South Korea has long been experiencing economic downturn driven by global economic recession since the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, and the accompanying high unemployment alienates the unem-

ployed and their families in our society, which makes our society unstable since the self-image gets build up based on the perception on others seeing oneself in interpersonal interactions (Cooley, 1972; Kim, 2018). This relational self-concept emphasizes that self-image is influenced by the messages that are exchanged within the relationship. It means that as the role of an individual in the society changes, one's perceived oppression by the society also constantly changes according to which group one belongs to and how one exchanges the message.

This study examines inequality and social constraint that are imposed on an individual from the two different perspectives. In the institutional environment surroundings, especially in modern capitalist societies, where a certain level of socio-economic constraint is given to each individual, an individual perceives inequality as a form of limitation which can be summarized as 'oppression'. This study looks at how individual, who interacts within the network, produces differences between social-structural oppression and subjective oppression. First, this study examines how the degree of social support that an individual has is influenced by the degree of institutional constraints by the individual's current socio-economic position according to the distributed resources in the society. Then, it examines

<sup>a</sup> PhD candidate of the Graduate School of Public Administration at Seoul National University. E-mail: nklee@snu.ac.kr

<sup>b</sup> Corresponding author, is a professor of the Graduate School of Public Administration at Seoul National University. E-mail: tobin@snu.ac.kr

whether the social support mediates the socio-economic position and the degree of perceived oppression of individuals.

**Research Question:**

Does social support mediate the relationship between individual's socio-economic position and perceived oppression?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Perceived Oppression

#### *The Concept of Oppression*

The term oppression originates in Latin, meaning to remove painful thoughts and impulses from consciousness (Schwartz & Kline, 1995). Young (2011) describes oppression as a concept of structural phenomena that incapacitate a group of people. Young argues that social inequality should be understood in terms of oppression and domination rather than distribution. According to her, the view, that social values such as rights, opportunities and self-esteem can be distributed, hides the institutional and social basis which have adverse effects on previously segregated groups. Prejudice against women, sexual minorities, people of color, and people with disabilities is embedded in various institutions, either because they are designed from the privileged groups' perspectives, or the institutions still reflect the subordinate relations that official rules have already outlawed. As a result, the oppressed groups experience avoidance, disgust, anxiety and stereotyping. In a similar vein, Harvey (1999) uses the term "civilized oppression" to characterize everyday process of oppression embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols.

#### *Components of Oppression*

This study utilizes the components of oppression presented by Young (1990) which can be divided into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

First, exploitation explains that oppression arises through the continual process in which labor product of one social group is transferred to benefit other groups. In pre-capitalist societies, domination was exercised directly through political means, but in capitalist societies, according to labor theory of value (LTV), profit from the difference between the value of labor performed and the value of labor purchased is taken by the capitalist (Marx, 1867). Macpherson (1973) and Reiman (1987) explain that in the process of power transfer and class process, the capitalist class sustains by extracting profits from workers. Meyers (2004) and Valdman (2009) develop accounts of exploitation as taking unfair advantage of others. According to Wertheimer (1997), A exploits B when A takes unfair advantage of B. Following this stream of discussions, this study sees the core concept of exploitation is on 'the unfair social structure on how social benefits are transferred between groups'.

Second, marginalization is the act of relegating or confining a group of people to a lower social standing or edge of society (Young, 2011). Marginalized people refer to people whom the labor system cannot use or is unwilling to use.

Although material deprivation can be mitigated through welfare policy, the problem still remains since the opportunity to exercise ones' capacities is blocked through marginalization. Examples of marginalization include those who do not belong to the elderly, but cannot find a new job after the retirement, single mothers and their children, involuntarily unemployed people, intellectually disabled and physically disabled, etc. Eisenberg (2006) argues that marginalization distorts the opportunities of individuals within particular social groups. The UNESCO sponsored Education For All (EFA) Forum (2020) suggests that marginalization occurs when people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation opportunities for economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity in their communities. Combining the discussions above, this study views the concept of marginalization as 'being excluded from economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of participation to seize new opportunities'.

Third, those who are under 'powerlessness' are those who need to obey the norms of the society, but have little or no right to set the norms (Young, 2011). Powerlessness also represents a status in division of labor, including social status, where it gives little opportunity for skill honing and exercise. The powerless have no authority, no position, no pride which professional workers have. Professional privileges extend beyond work to the entire facets of life. Young named this 'respectability'. Having respectability is that they have authority or influence to be listened to what they say or ask for. Young's view on powerlessness emphasizing respectability is closely related to the social class. Skeggs (1997) and Hanley (2016) also explain respectability using the social class. Scott (2021) illustrates powerlessness as receptive and passive due to one's adverse position and identity. Le Grand (2015) links powerlessness to respectability and class identities. Deutsch (2006) emphasizes the role of self-image describing powerlessness explaining interactional process to produce and perpetuate oppression system by public images and self-images. Following this stream of ideas, this study views powerlessness as a concept on 'having no respectability due to one's adverse position and class identity'.

Fourth, Young describes 'cultural imperialism' as universalization of experience and culture of the ruling group and establishing them as the only norm of the society. Frazer (2006) explains that 'asymmetrical reciprocity' which connotes fragility and provisionality of communication drives frictional, conflictual, and partial ways of looking at issues. Salwen (1991) notes that cultural imperialism is an ideologically loaded term frequently invoked to describe the effects of Western mass media on foreign audiences. Following these dialogues, this study views the concept of cultural imperialism is on 'spreading advantageous groups' favorable experience and culture by biased media report'.

Fifth, speaking of 'violence', Young focuses on systemic violence. According to her, violence is a rule-dependent trait. Members of any group live with the fear that attacks will be made randomly on their bodies or properties at any time. Young (2011) explains that what makes violence an aspect of oppression is not the specific acts of violence itself, but the social environment or social context that makes them possible and even acceptable. This is because

violence exists as a social practice beyond a personal moral error. Following this, this study views the concept of violence as existence of potential danger spread in the community. In the analysis this paper equally reflects the five concepts of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence in measuring perceived oppression.

## **Socio-economic position and perceived oppression**

### ***Concept of Socio-economic position***

Many of the discussions in organizing social and economic status into conceptual units are ongoing and there is no single unified concept yet. Nevertheless, the term 'socio-economic position (SEP)' refers to socio-economic factors which affect certain position an individual or group occupies within a social structure. This is a concept that includes social class, social stratification, social inequality, and socio-economic status (SES) (Berkman & Kawachi, 2003). According to Krieger et al. (1997) and Kahng & Kwon (2008), socio-economic position is based on social position, such as rank in occupation, education level, and income level. Following these, this study uses individuals' occupational status, income level, and education level to measure socio-economic position.

### ***The relationship between socio-economic position and perceived oppression***

Many health psychologists argue that depending on different socioeconomic positions, differences in social experiences and behavioral characteristics formed by these experiences result in inequality in physical and mental health (Taylor et al., 1997), and perceived capability and limitations of oneself. Lorant et al. (2003), Kim et al. (2003) and Kahng & Kwon (2008) point out that low socio-economic status increases the risk of depression. Depression is a factor that can have a great effect on getting trapped in one's own thoughts, which can be strongly linked to the subjective oppression. Craig & Van Natta (1979), Kim et al. (2003) and Lee et al. (2002) explain the significant correlation between low education level and depression. Shin (1997) argues that identity is not a product of individual psychology, but rather a relationship formed with other people or institutions, revealed through official systems, which is in line with the process of producing oppression perception through the influence of individuals' socio-economic position.

Young (1990) explains that affinity and differentiation create groups within people. However, in large, complex, and highly differentiated societies such as today's society, objectively assigned socio-economic constraints may not necessarily give an individual a specifically constant subjective sense of perceived oppression. Therefore, this study explores the mediating role of social support between those two.

## **Social support and perceived oppression**

### ***Concept of social support***

Academic interest in social support began with the classic study of social integration and suicide by Durkheim (1952). The concept of social support refers to the process of being helped by others, which is influenced by the nature of the social environment or social relationships, and at the same time by the interaction between and among the social actors who provide or receive social support. According to the National Society of Social Welfare in the United States, social support refers to the formal and informal relationship that humans provide to meet the desire to live in society (Barker, 2007). Feldman & Cohen (2000) view social support as a process of providing assistance to others, while Johnson (1992) sees it as providing resources to others in need. Sung (1990) sees that social support refers to various forms of protection and services such as emotional support, guidance, material assistance, being friends when needed, caring for difficulties, and helping them receive professional services. Collectively, social support can be seen as emotional, material and informational help that an individual receive through their interaction and relationships with others.

### ***Components of social support***

There are several views on distinguishing components of social support. One of the main stream views is to distinguish between structural and functional aspects. First, (1) structural support is a quantification of social relationships, as the extent to which an individual participates in various social relationships, including the frequency of the social activities or the number of roles an individual participates in. For example, the frequency can be expressed through the presence of a spouse, family and relatives, or contact frequency with friends. Next, (2) functional support means the resources actually provided by members within a social relationship, and depending on the nature of the resources they provide, they perform key functions such as emotional, instrumental and informational support. First, (2-1) emotional support means a sense of security that they are loved and protected by others, and (2-2) instrumental support means actual or practical help to material needs in daily lives. (2-3) Informational support means receiving guidance or feedback from others. In this study, the structural aspect is measured by the frequency with which an individual come into contact with family, relatives, friends and acquaintances, and the functional aspect is measured by the emotional and instrumental support.

### ***Social support and socio-economic position***

Lin (2000) talks about the inequality of social capital, which is similar to social support, and points out two factors. Firstly, if one is in socio-economically disadvantaged position, one's social capital gets also reduced. Secondly, individuals in similar socio-economic positions relate to each other, along with the characteristics of 'homophily'. Here, of the two factors presented by Lin, the first factor can be seen as structural social support. Against the backdrop

of the historical and institutional structures of the society, each society has provided different opportunities to build up social capital structurally according to race, gender, religion, class and others. Christakis & Fowler (2009) suggests that the number of relational nodes that individuals have and the socio-economic forces that they possess are significantly correlated. Kavanaugh et al. (2007) also argue that the more connected people in the neighborhood are, the higher the economic income they have. In this regard, this study considers the impact of socio-economic constraints on a person's social relationships.

### **Relationship between social support and perceived oppression**

Kim (2018) explains that communication is the foundation of mental flexibility and tolerance which are indispensable in order for an individual to feel autonomy in an uncertain environment, suggesting that an individual can overcome the limitations of self through conversations with others. According to her, one's identity is inherently multi-layered, and self-identity is constantly created through various networks of relationships. From this point of view, when an individual is isolated in a very weak state of social relations, the individual's perceived self-identity slowly regresses towards the most negative and weakest state. If a person's identity becomes fixed and narrower by severed human relationships, one's perceived oppression is highly likely to increase with already existing many other socio-economic constraints in the life.

In the book *Rethinking Relationships*, Duck (2010) suggests that relationships show how individuals understand the world. He explains that the self-image of an individual's understanding of oneself begins to form out of social relationship, and so does how an individual sees the outer world. People come to have a wider range of diverse and weak network ties. Despite these changes, people still recognize and define which specific groups they belong to in the society by their race, region, age, gender, or occupation (Ross, 1980). Young (2011) points out that the sense of belonging to a certain group, that even the oppressed group of people in the society have, still hold important meaning to their lives. Habermas (1987)'s theory of communication behavior also notes that an individual's identity is a product of verbal and behavioral interactions.

Christakis & Fowler (2009) also confirm that unhappy people in the network are among unhappy people and happy people are among happy people, and that unhappy people seem to be located in the periphery rather than in the center of the network. They explain that while social networks can help us do things that we cannot do on our own, connections can often make many people more powerful. It is possible to infer that if the amount of social support is high, the more power and autonomy are available.

Cohen et al. (2000) suggest that social support has a buffer effect, improves the ability to cope with problems by supportive actions provided by others, and reduces the negative assessment of stress. Putnam (1995) also points out that an individual, who lacks the opportunity to test if his opinion is right via small talks or public discussion, has higher possibility to be triggered by negative impulses.

The social support can offer a small but strong sense of freedom when an individual feels disempowered in the society. It can have a great impact not only on one's choice of behavior, but also on how one views the world, and on one's perception of autonomy in one's own life. Comprehending the previous literature review above, hypotheses of this study are as follows.

H1. Individual's socio-economic position will decrease one's perceived oppression.

H1-1. Individual's occupational status will decrease one's perceived oppression.

H1-2. Individual's income level will decrease one's perceived oppression.

H1-3. Individual's education level will decrease one's perceived oppression.

H2. Individual's socio-economic position will increase one's social support.

H2-1. Individual's occupational status will increase one's social support.

H2-2. Individual's income level will increase one's social support.

H2-3. Individual's education level will increase one's social support.

H3. Individual's social support will decrease one's perceived oppression.

H4. Social support will mediate the negative relationship between individual's socio-economic position and perceived oppression.

H4-1. Social support will mediate the negative relationship between individual's occupational status and perceived oppression.

H4-2. Social support will mediate the negative relationship between individual's income level and perceived oppression.

H4-3. Social support will mediate the negative relationship between individual's education level and perceived oppression.

## **METHODS**

Table 1 and figure 1 show the research framework and analysis model that summarize the hypotheses of the paper, comprising of socio-economic position, consisting of occupational status/income level/education level as independent variables, social support consisting of structural and functional support, and perceived oppression, consisting of exploitation/marginalization/powerlessness/cultural imperialism/violence.

### **Data**

The data used is Social Integration Survey which was conducted by Gallup Korea under the auspices of the Korea Institute of Public Administration (KIPA). The purpose of this survey is to identify the trends in the general public perception of Korean society and provide basis for establishing government policies. The survey targeted 8,000 men and women aged between 19 and 69 nationwide in South Korea in 2016.

**Table 1. Research Framework**

Independent variable: Socio-economic position (SEP)			Dependent variable: Perceived Oppression	
Occupational Status	Regular / Temporary / Day laborer		→	(1) The degree to which one can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard (2) The degree to which one's child can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard (3) Perceived fairness of tax policy (4) Perceived fairness of welfare benefits (5) Perceived fairness of large corporations and small enterprises relationship (6) Perceived fairness of socioeconomic distribution structure (7) Perceived fairness of employment
Income Level	Nominal Income	Monthly household income average for last 1 year		
	Real Income	(1) Experience of skipping meals due to being unable to cover the food expenses (2) Experience of being unable to get medical treatment due to hospital expenses (3) Experience of receiving a loan due to difficulty in affording the tuition (4) Experience of involuntary unemployment (5) Experience of being unable to pay the utility bills within the deadline (6) Experience of changing one's residence due to rising rent		
Education Level	No schooling & Elementary School / Middle School / High School / 2 year college, 4 year university, M.D. & Ph.D.			
Control variable: Demographic variable			Marginalization	(1) Perceived fairness on balanced development of regions
Gender	Male / Female (dummy)		Powerlessness	(1) Perceived socioeconomic position of one's own
Age	19 ~ 69 (years)		Cultural Imperialism	(1) Perceived fairness of media report
↓			→	(1) Perceived safety of the strict one lives in (2) Perceived safety of the city & province one lives in (3) Perceived safety of the society one lives in
Mediating variable: Social Support				
Structural Support	(1) Number of people (from family or relative) one meets on a weekday (2) Number of people (besides family or relative) one meets on a weekday			
Functional Support	(1) Number of people whom one can borrow money from when suddenly in need of large sum of money (2) Number of people whom one can ask for help when sick (3) Number of people whom one can talk to when stressed or depressed			

**Variables**

In this study, the dependent variable is perceived oppression. The sub-concepts of oppression described by Young (1990) in the survey of 2016 data in Social Integration Survey were utilized corresponding to exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. This study saw the core concept of oppression is on ‘the unfair social structure behind how social benefits are transferred between groups’.

First, exploitation is composed of 7 questions to describe ‘structural transfer of benefit’ which is the core concept in Young’s description including labor exploitation and capital

exploitation. 2 questions on the possibility of climbing social ladder was measured in 4-point scale. The rest 5 questions on fairness of tax, welfare, employment, corporation and enterprise relationship, and socioeconomic distribution structure were also measured in 4-point scale. Each of 7 Likert scale questions was standardized, and went through factor analysis before being combined into one item, exploitation.

Second, this study views the concept of marginalization as ‘being excluded from economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of participation to seize new opportunities’. Considering the special regional context of South Korea, where the domestic geographical region still works as a

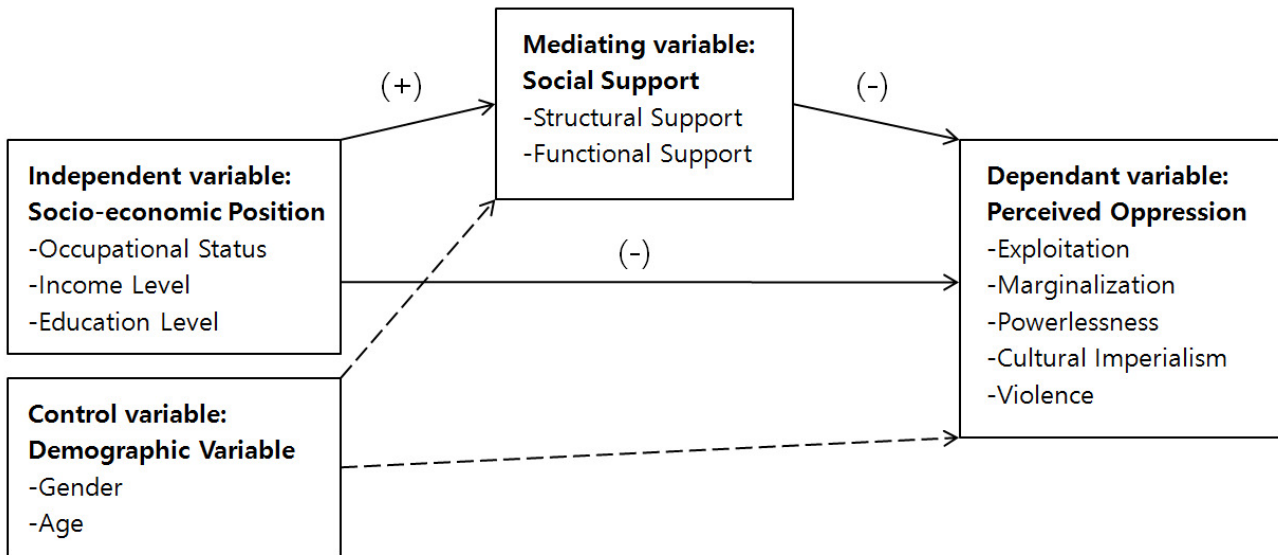


Figure 1. Analysis Model

critical matter to determine one’s political inclination, educational environment, opportunities to find jobs, and identity of orientation, this study used following 4-point Likert scale question ‘perceived fairness on balanced development of regions’.

Third, following previous studies, this study saw powerlessness as a concept ‘having no respectability due to one’s adverse position and class identity’. Powerlessness was measured by a 11-point Likert scale question on perceived socio-economic position of one’s own.

Fourth, following the previous studies, this study views the concept of cultural imperialism as ‘spreading advantageous groups’ favorable experience and culture by biased media report’ that we set the measurement as ‘perceived fairness of media report’ which is a 4-point Likert scale question.

Fifth, Young emphasized the social environment behind the acts of violence that this study saw the concept of violence as existence of potential danger spread in the community. Thus, we used three of 11-point Likert scale questions on the perceived safety of (1) strict, (2) city, and (3) society. After standardization of each items and factor analysis they were combined into one item, violence.

Each 5 sub-concepts of perceived oppression were standardized and went through factor analysis prior to being combined into one final dependent variable. The standardization of combined final variable perceived oppression was once again conducted prior to the analysis.

The independent variables are socio-economic position (SEP), composed of occupational status, income level and education level. Occupational status consists of a 3-point scale question. Income level consists of two different concepts of income, nominal income with 12-point scale, and real income, measured by summing up 6 dummy questions on experiences due to lack of income. Each of those 2 sub-variables was standardized first hand, and then went through factor analysis. Education level consists of an 4-point ordinal scale question. Each of the three indepen-

dent variables was standardized before the analysis.

The mediating variable is social support which is composed of functional support and structural support. Structural support was measured by combining the two ratio scale questions asking on how many people one meets a day, among the family members (5-point scale), and beside family members (7-point scale). Standardization and factor analysis were conducted on each of two items. Functional support consists of 3 questions (5-point scale). After factor analysis they were summed up into one variable, functional support. Standardization and factor analysis were conducted on structural support and functional support before combining them into one variable, social support. Standardization on the final item social support was conducted prior to analyses.

The control variables were sorted out by the degree that they are expected to affect subjective perception on oppression. The control variables comprise of personal characteristics, including gender and age.

Then we conducted reliability test on variables that comprises of more than a single question. Those variables are (1) exploitation and (2) violence which are sub-concepts of perceived oppression, (3) real income which is a sub-concept of income level of socio-economic position, and (4) functional support which is a sub-concept of social support.

The sub-concepts of dependent variable, perceived oppression that have multi-questions to measure are ‘exploitation’ and ‘violence’. This paper uses 7 questions to measure exploitation. Its cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value turned out 0.814 which is deemed reliable. For violence, this paper uses 3 questions. Its cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value turned out 0.789 which is deemed reliable. The cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value for real income variable among the income level of socio-economic position, which is composed of 6 questions, turned out 0.618 thus, reliable. The cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value for functional support turned out 0.724 which is deemed reliable.

**Table 2. Reliability Test Result**

Variables		Questionnaire	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Perceived oppression	Exploitation	1. The degree to which one can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he works hard 2. The degree to which one's child can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he works hard 3. Perceived fairness of tax policy 4. Perceived fairness of welfare benefits 5. Perceived fairness of large corporations and small enterprises 6. Perceived fairness of socioeconomic distribution structure 7. Perceived fairness of employment	0.814
	Violence	1. Perceived safety of the strict one lives in 2. Perceived safety of the city & province one lives in 3. Perceived safety of the society one lives in	0.789
Socio-economic position	Income level	1. Exp. of skipping meals due to being unable to cover the food expenses 2. Exp. of being unable to get medical treatment due to hospital expenses 3. Exp. of receiving a loan due to difficulty in affording the tuition 4. Exp. of involuntary unemployment 5. Exp. of being unable to pay the utility bills within the deadline 6. Exp. of changing one's residence due to rising rent	0.690
	Real income		
Social support	Functional support	1. N of ppl one can borrow money from when suddenly in need of large sum of money 2. N of ppl one can ask for help when sick 3. N of ppl one can talk to when stressed or depressed	0.724

**Analysis**

To test the proposed hypotheses, this study conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses, Baron & Kenny (1990)'s mediating effect analyses,<sup>1</sup> and bootstrapping methods with SPSS 20.0 program.

**RESULT**

**Descriptive Statistics**

We checked descriptive statistics to figure out basic characteristics of response. The question items are measured in different point scales that we decided to standardize each question.

**Pearson Correlation Analysis**

According to Pearson correlation analysis on dependent, independent, mediating, and control variables, it turned out that age, occupational status, income level, and social support are in statistically significant correlation with perceived oppression.

**Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

**Impact of SEP on perceived oppression**

Before performing hierarchical regression analysis, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was examined to check whether the basic assumptions of the regression analysis were adequately satisfied. It turned out that VIF of the variables are between 1.038 and 1.417 which are close to 1. As it is conventionally deemed acceptable if VIF value is under 10, there is no significant problem with multi-collinearity in the model.

In order to test hypothesis 1: An individual's socio-economic position will have a negative impact on perceived oppression, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with gender and age as control variables. In stage 1, age ( $\beta = -.134, p < .001$ ) was observed to have statistically significant effect.

Stage 2 was analyzed by adding socio-economic position variables to the model in stage 1. According to the result, the higher the socio-economic position is, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. Among the sub-concepts of socio-economic position variables, especially occupational status ( $\beta = -.042, p < .01$ ), and income

<sup>1</sup> There are several conditions for Baron & Kenny's mediating effect analysis to be established. First, the independent variable must have a significant effect on the mediating variable. Second, the mediating variable must have a significant effect on the dependent variable. Third, when the mediating variable is included, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should not exist or be less than the effect of independent variable on dependent variable. In other words, when adding a mediator, the effect of the independent variable ( $\beta$  value) on the dependent variable should be reduced. If the effect gets smaller, it means that there is a partial mediating effect, and if there is no effect, it means that there is a full mediating effect.

**Table 3. Composition of Measurement**

Dependent variable: Socio-economic position (SEP)				
Sub-concept	Measurement Question		Response Category	Scale
Exploitation	1. The degree to which one can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard 2. The degree to which one's child can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard		1. Strongly disagree 2. Partially disagree 3. Partially agree 4. Strongly agree	4
	3. Perceived fairness of tax policy 4. Perceived fairness of welfare benefits 5. Perceived fairness of large corporations and small enterprises relationship 6. Perceived fairness of socioeconomic distribution structure 7. Perceived fairness of employment		1. Very unfair 2. Somewhat unfair 3. Somewhat fair 4. Very fair	4
Marginalization	1. Perceived fairness on balanced development of regions		1. Very unfair 2. Somewhat unfair 3. Somewhat fair 4. Very fair	4
Powerlessness	2. Perceived socioeconomic position of one's own		0. Very low ~ 10. Very high	11
Cultural Imperialism	1. Perceived fairness of media report		1. Very unfair 2. Somewhat unfair 3. Somewhat fair 4. Very fair	4
Violence	1. Perceived safety of the strict one lives in 2. Perceived safety of the city & province one lives in 3. Perceived safety of the society one lives in		0. Very dangerous ~ 10. Very safe	11
Independent variable: Socio-economic position (SEP)				
Variable	Sub-concept	Measurement Question	Response Category	Scale
Occupational Status		Position at work	1.Regular 2.Temporary 3.Day laborer (Reverse coding)	3
Income Level	Nominal Income	Monthly household income average for last 1 year	1. No income 2. Less than 1 million 3. 1~2 million 4. 2~3 million ~ 10. 8~9 million 11. 9~10 million 12. More than 10 million (Korean Won)	12
	Real Income	1. Exp. of skipping meals due to being unable to cover food expenses 2. Exp. of being unable to get medical trt. due to hospital expenses 3. Exp. of receiving a loan due to difficulty in affording the tuition 4. Exp. of involuntary unemployment 5. Exp. of being unable to pay the utility bills within the deadline 6. Exp. of changing one's residence due to rising rent	1. Yes / 2. No (Reverse coding)	Dummy
Education Level		How far have you received formal education	No schooling & Elementary School / Middle School / High School / College and more	4
Mediating variable: Social Support				
Sub-concept	Measurement Question		Response Category	Scale
Structural Support	1. N of ppl (from family or relative) one meets on a weekday		1.0 / 2.1~2 / 3.3~4 / 4.5~9 / 5.10~	5



	2. N of ppl (besides family or relative) one meets on a weekday	1.0 / 2.1~2 / 3.3~4 / 4.5~9 / 5.10~19 / 6.20~49 / 7.50~	7
Functional Support	1. N of ppl whom one can borrow money from when suddenly in need of large sum of money 2. N of ppl whom one can ask for help when sick 3. N of ppl whom one can talk to when stressed or depressed	1.0 / 2.1~2 / 3.3~4 / 4.5~9 / 5.10~	5
Control variable: Demographic variable			
Sub-concept	Measurement Question	Response Category	Scale
	Gender	Male / Female	Dummy
	Age	19 ~ 69 (years)	Ratio

level ( $\beta = -.170, p < .001$ ) were observed to have statistically significant effect on perceived oppression. The explanatory power of this regression model increased when socio-economic position variables were injected.

### Impact of SEP on Social Support

In order to test hypothesis 2: An individual's socio-economic position will have a positive impact on social support, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with gender and age as control variables. In stage 1, both gender and age were observed to have statistically significant effects.

Socio-economic position variables were added in stage 2. As a result, the higher the socio-economic position is, the more social support an individual is likely to have. Among the socio-economic position variables, all of the three, occupational status ( $\beta = .054, p < .01$ ), income level ( $\beta = .059, p < .001$ ), and education level ( $\beta = .209, p < .001$ ) turned out statistically significant on perceived oppression. The explanatory power of this model increased when socio-economic position variables were added to equation.

### Impact of Social Support on Perceived Oppression

In order to test hypothesis 3: An individual's social support will have a negative impact on perceived oppression, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. In stage 1, age ( $\beta = -.134, p < .001$ ) was observed to have statistically significant effect.

Stage 2 was analyzed by adding social support variables to the model in stage 1. According to the result, the higher the social support is, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. In stage 2, age ( $\beta = -.138, p < .001$ ) and social support ( $\beta = -.053, p < .001$ ) were observed to have statistically significant effect. The explanatory power of model increased when social support variable was added.

### Mediating Effect of Social support between SEP and Perceived Oppression

Next, in order to test hypothesis 4: An individual's social support will mediate the negative relationship between individual's socio-economic position and perceived oppression, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with gender and age as control variables. To observe the medi-

ating effect of social support between the relationship of SEP and perceived oppression, 3 stage-model hierarchical regression analyses were conducted by each sub-concept of SEP.

First, an hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to observe the mediating effect of social support between the relationship of occupational status and perceived oppression. In stage 1, age ( $\beta = -.107, p < .001$ ) turned out statistically significant on perceived oppression. Occupational status was added in stage 2. According to the result, the higher the occupational status ( $\beta = -.042, p < .01$ ) is, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. Stage 3 was analyzed by adding social support variable to the model in stage 2. According to the result, the higher the occupational status ( $\beta = -.039, p < .05$ ) and social support ( $\beta = -.055, p < .001$ ) are, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. The explanatory power of this model increased when occupational status and social support were added. As both the impact of occupational status and social support on perceived oppression turned out significant, partial mediating impact of social support between occupational status and perceived oppression was verified.

Second, an hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to observe the mediating effect of social support between the relationship of income level and perceived oppression. In stage 1, gender and age were injected as well. Income level was added in stage 2. According to the result, the higher the income level ( $\beta = -.170, p < .001$ ) is, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. Stage 3 was analyzed by adding social support variable to the model in stage 2. According to the result, the higher the income level ( $\beta = -.167, p < .001$ ) and social support ( $\beta = -.043, p < .001$ ) are, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. The explanatory power of the model increased when income level and social support were added. As both the impact of income level and social support on perceived oppression turned out significant, partial mediating impact of social support between income level and perceived oppression was observed in this model.

Third, an hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to observe the mediating effect of social support between the relationship of education level and perceived oppression. In stage 1, gender and age were injected as personal characteristic variables. In stage 2, education level was added. According to the result, it turned out that education level itself does not have statistically significant effect on

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics**

Variables		N	Pct. (%)	min.	max.	Mean	S.D.	
Perceived Oppression	The degree to which one can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard	8000	100.0	1	4	2.44	.768	
	The degree to which one's child can climb the social ladder in South Korea if he/she works hard	8000	100.0	1	4	2.56	.802	
	Perceived fairness of tax policy	8000	100.0	1	4	2.26	.765	
	Perceived fairness of welfare benefits	8000	100.0	1	4	2.36	.743	
	Perceived fairness of large corporations and small enterprises relationship	8000	100.0	1	4	2.08	.729	
	Perceived fairness of socioeconomic distribution structure	8000	100.0	1	4	2.09	.719	
	Perceived fairness of employment	8000	100.0	1	4	2.22	.758	
Occupation. Status	Regular worker	3097	38.7	1	3	1.29	.585	
	Temporary worker	624	7.8					
	Day Laborer	271	3.4					
Income Level	Nominal Income	Monthly household income average for last 1 year	8000	100.0	1	12	5.59	2.149
	Real Income	Exp. of skipping meals due to being unable to cover the food expenses	8000	100.0	1	2	1.99	.120
		Exp. of being unable to get medical treatment due to hospital expenses	8000	100.0	1	2	1.95	.214
		Exp. of receiving a loan due to difficulty in affording the tuition	8000	100.0	1	2	1.90	.294
		Exp. of involuntary unemployment	8000	100.0	1	2	1.97	.180
		Exp. of being unable to pay the utility bills within the deadline	8000	100.0	1	2	1.93	.254
		Exp. of changing one's residence due to rising rent	8000	100.0	1	2	1.93	.253
Education Level	No Schooling / Elementary School	329	4.1	1	4	3.26	.762	
	Middle School	570	7.1					
	High School	3806	47.6					
	2 year college / 4 year university / M.D. / Ph.D.	3295	41.2					
Social Support	Structural Support	N of people (from family or relative)	8000	100.0	1	5	2.30	.988
		N of people (besides family or relative)	8000	100.0	1	7	3.28	1.222
	Functional Support	N of people whom one can borrow money from when suddenly in need of large sum of money	8000	100.0	1	5	1.94	.733
		N of people whom one can ask for help when sick	8000	100.0	1	5	2.17	.659
		N of people whom one	8000	100.0	1	5	2.33	.762

		can talk to when stressed or depressed						
Gender	Female		3933	49.2	1	2	1.492	.500
	Male		4067	50.8				
Age	19~29		1582	19.8	1	5	2.91	1.334
	30~39		1610	20.1				
	40~49		1875	23.4				
	50~59		1793	22.4				
	60~69		1141	14.3				

**Table 5. Result of Pearson Correlation Analysis**

	Gender	Age	Occupational Status	Income Level	Education Level	Social Support	Perceived Oppression
Gender	1						
Age	.022*	1					
Occupational Status	-.169**	-.193**	1				
Income Level	-.039**	-.069**	.222**	1			
Education Level	-.129**	-.547**	.355**	.206**	1		
Social Support	.025*	-.064**	.052**	.062**	.176**	1	
Perceived Oppression	.009	-.134**	-.022	-.160**	.059**	-.044*	1

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

**Table 6. Impact of SEP on perceived oppression**

Variables	Model 1		Model 2 (Occupational Status → Perceived Oppression)		Model 2 (Income Level → Perceived Oppression)		Model 2 (Education Level → Perceived Oppression)		
	B	B	B	β	B	β	B	β	
(constant)	.259		.244		.303		.287		
Control Variable	Gender	.023	.011	.024	.011	.010	.005	.019	.009
	Age	-.101	-.134***	-.098	-.116***	-.109	-.146***	-.108	-.144***
Independent Variable	SEP			-.043	-.042**	-.170	-.170***	-.018	-.018
R <sup>2</sup>	.018		.014		.047		.018		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.018		.013		.046		.018		
F	73.454		18.548		130.421		49.592		

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

perceived oppression. In stage 3 social support variable was added. According to the result, the higher the social support ( $\beta = -.052, p < .001$ ) is, the less perceived oppression an individual is likely to have. The explanatory power of this model increased when social support was added. As the impact of education level on social support, and the impact of social support on perceived oppression turned out statisti-

cally significant while the impact of education level itself does not, the full mediating effect of social support between education level and perceived oppression was observed.

**Table 7. Impact of SEP on Social Support**

Variables		Model 1		Model 2 (Occupational Status → Social Support)		Model 2 (Income Level → Social Support)		Model 2 (Education Level → Social Support)	
		B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
	(constant)	.063		-.075		.048		-.259	
Control Variable	Gender	.053	.027*	.111	.056**	.057	.029*	.102	.051***
	Age	-.049	-.065***	-.032	-.040*	-.046	-.061***	.037	.049***
Influencing Variable	SEP			.052	.054**	.059	.059***	.209	.209***
R <sup>2</sup>		.005		.008		.008		.035	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.005		.007		.008		.035	
F		19.540		10.286		22.406		96.523	

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

**Table 8. Impact of Social Support on Perceived Oppression**

Variables		Model 1		Model 2	
		B	$\beta$	B	B
	(Constant)	.259		.262	
Control Variable	Gender	.023	.011	.026	.013
	Age	-.101	-.134***	-.103	-.138***
Influencing Variable	Social Support			-.053	-.053***
R <sup>2</sup>		.018		.018	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.021		.020	
F		73.454		56.695	

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

**Bootstrapping analysis**

**Mediating Effect of Social support between Occupational status and Perceived Oppression**

In order to verify mediating effect of social support between SEP and perceived oppression, bootstrapping analysis was conducted. The regression coefficients extracted from bootstrapping method are presented in [table 10](#), which shows different numerical values from the regression coefficients in hierarchical regression analyses above, since they were extracted from bootstrapping regression analysis method. According to the result, occupational status has statistically significant positive impact ( $B=.059, p<.001$ ) on social support, while occupational status has statistically significant negative impact ( $B=-.051, p<.01$ ) on perceived oppression. Lastly, when occupational status and social support were put into the model at the same time, both turned out to have statistically significant negative impact ( $B=-.049, p<.001; B=-.041, p<.05$ ) on perceived oppression, showing partial mediation effect.

Next, in order to see the indirect effect of social support, we checked the degree of effect of each path and the figure

of LLCI and ULCI in 95% confidence interval. According to [table 11](#), the indirect effect of occupational status on perceived oppression via social support turned out [-.0054--.0004] that the mediating effect of social support is statistically significant since it does not include 0.

**Mediating Effect of Social support between Income level and Perceived Oppression**

Verifying mediating effect of social support between income level and perceived oppression, through bootstrapping analysis, in [table 12](#), income level has statistically significant positive impact ( $B=.053, p<.001$ ) on social support, while income level has statistically significant negative impact ( $B=-.160, p<.01$ ) on perceived oppression. Lastly, when income level and social support were put into the model at the same time, it turned out that both have statistically significant negative impact ( $B=-.158, p<.001; B=-.042, p<.05$ ) on perceived oppression, showing partial mediation effect.

Next, we checked the degree of effect of each path and the figure of LLCI and ULCI in 95% confidence interval. In [table 13](#), the indirect effect of income level on perceived oppression via social support turned out [-.0040--.0007] that

the mediating effect of social support is statistically significant.

***Mediating Effect of Social support between Education level and Perceived oppression***

Verifying mediating effect of social support between education level and perceived oppression, in [table 14](#), edu-

cation level has statistically significant positive impact( $B=.180$ ,  $p<.001$ ) on social support. When education level and social support were put into the model at once, social support has statistically significant negative impact( $B=-.050$ ,  $p<.001$ ) on perceived oppression, showing complete mediation effect.

**Table 9. Mediating Effect of Social Support between SEP and Perceived Oppression**

Variables		Model 1		Model 2 (Occupational Status → Perceived Oppression)		Model 3 (Occupational Status & Social Support → Perceived Oppression)		Model 2 (Income Level → Perceived Oppression)		Model 3 (Income Level & Social Support → Perceived Oppression)		Model 2 (Education Level → Perceived Oppression)		Model 3 (Education Level & Social Support → Perceived Oppression)	
		B	B	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	B	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
	(constant)	.202		.244		.240		.303		.305		.287		.273	
Control Variable	Gender	.040	.019	.024	.011	.030	.014	.010	.005	.013	.006	.019	.009	.024	.012
	Age	-.091	-.107***	-.098	-.116***	-.100	-.118***	-.109	-.146***	-.111	-.148***	-.108	-.144***	-.106	-.141***
Independent Variable	SEP			-.043	-.042**	-.040	-.039*	-.170	-.170***	-.167	-.167***	-.018	-.018	-.007	-.007
Mediating Variable	Social Support					-.058	-.055***			-.043	-.043***			-.052	-.052***
R <sup>2</sup>		.012		.014		.017		.047		.048		.018		.021	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.012		.013		.016		.046		.048		.018		.020	
F		24.412		18.548		17.004		130.421		101.858		49.592		42.591	

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

**Table 10. Regression analysis result via bootstrapping method**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coeff.	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
Social Support	Occupational Status	.059***	.016	3.789	.029	.090	.0095	12.729
Perceived Oppression	Occupational Status	-.051**	.016	-3.182	-.083	-.020	.0116	15.642
Perceived Oppression	Occupational Status	-.049**	.016	-3.027	-.080	-.017	.0132	13.348
	Social Support	-.041*	.016	-2.530	-.073	-.009		

\*\*\*p<.001

**Table 11. Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis result**

Path	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect (Occupational Status → Perceived Oppression)	-.0512	.0161	-.0828	-.0197
Direct effect (Occupational Status → Perceived Oppression)	-.0488	.0161	-.0804	-.0172
Indirect effect (Occupational Status → Social Support → Perceived Oppression)	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
	-.0024	.0013	-.0054	-.0004

**Table 12. Regression analysis result via bootstrapping method**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coeff.	SE	T	LLCI	ULCI	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
Social Support	Income Level	.053***	.012	4.598	.030	.076	.007	18.819
Perceived Oppression	Income Level	-.160***	.011	-14.147	-.182	-.138	.041	113.098
Perceived Oppression	Income Level	-.158***	.011	-13.948	-.180	-.136	.042	88.438
	Social Support	-.041***	.011	-3.730	-.063	-.020		

\*\*\*p<.001

**Table 13. Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis result**

Path	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect (Income Level → Perceived Oppression)	-.1602	.0113	-.1824	-.1380
Direct effect (Income Level → Perceived Oppression)	-.1580	.0113	-.1802	-.1358
Indirect effect (Income Level → Social Support → Perceived Oppression)	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
	-.0022	.0008	-.0040	-.0007

Next, checking the degree of effect of each path and the figure of LLCI and ULCI in 95% confidence interval in [table 15](#), the indirect effect of education level on perceived oppression via social support turned out [-.0139~-.0046] that the mediating effect of social support is statistically significant.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper delved into the impact of socio-economic position and social support on individual’s perceived oppression, and the mediating effect of social support between socio-economic position and one’s perceived oppression. At

**Table 14. Regression analysis result via bootstrapping method**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coeff.	SE	T	LLCI	ULCI	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
Social support	Education level	.180***	.013	13.658	.154	.206	.027	74.192
Perceived Oppression	Education level	-.004	.013	-2.77	-.030	.022	.017	45.276
Perceived Oppression	Education level	.0053	.014	.392	-.021	.032	.019	38.892
	Social Support	-.050***	.011	-4.408	-.072	-.028		

\*\*\*p<.001

**Table 15. Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis result**

Path	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect (Education Level → Perceived Oppression)	-.0037	.0133	-.0298	.0224
Direct effect (Education Level → Perceived Oppression)	.0053	.0135	-.0211	.0317
Indirect effect (Education Level → Social Support → Perceived Oppression)	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
	-.0090	.0024	-.0139	-.0046

the same time, it tried to distinguish subjective and physical oppression by dividing them into two distinct concepts which are socio-economic position and perceived oppression.

By verifying the mediating effect of social support between socio-economic position and perceived oppression of individual, the result gives us implication that social support is a pivotal factor in how individuals set one's position in the society not only from the physical realm, but also from the cognitive realm. As the flow in the blood vessel is essential for an individual to physically survive, the flow of social support in the social network is vital for an individual to socially and mentally survive in the society. Lacking the channels to express the ideas, individuals are likely to perceive invisible walls standing in their way, making them feel a greater sense of oppression.

The society is experiencing intensified bi-polarization which eventually leads to undermine social stability. Adding to this, the COVID-19 global pandemic crisis is currently intensifying social isolation. The government has implemented social distancing policy to mitigate the spread of virus. As people got more physically remote from each other, the isolation and thus loneliness people feel became more strong and rampant. Indeed, according to Seoul suicide prevention center, the suicide rate among female in their twenties has increased in 2020, implying that the physical isolation from the society and tough labor market condition due to COVID-19 have inflicted their 'social-unrest'.

The windows of individuals to the world should not be encumbered with oppression. An individual who lacks the pipelines is more likely to perceive the societal oppression, beyond the control of an individual such as unemployment, poverty and competition. At this point it seems reasonable to ask such a question: is our society a society that equally

treats individuals regardless of one's status of profession, education and income? If a society forces people to fit into a specific social standard and treats them as if they are a failure when they do not fit in, it is a society that lacks mature deliberation on the meaning of life. If it is so, what could an oppressed individual do in the structured society? Perception on how one sees oneself also flows depending on whom one meets, whom one talks to and whom one thinks of. What the government policy can do at this point is to prevent the social pipelines from blocking so that this constant process of identity-change be sustained. Just as the invisible hand is not only in the market, but also in our society, the government should engage in conserving the natural flow in the society by maintaining and building network pipelines through policy alternatives utilizing the new communication mechanisms during the global pandemic crisis and prolonged economic recession.

We have created and used various new communication mechanisms in the 21st century society, including social media services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. that are available beyond our spatial and social distance. Humans have a habit of associating with people of their own kind, and by building small, but largely overlapping social networks among individuals who share common grounds and interests via mediated communication, public policy can imbue perception of freedom and possibility which are the concepts on the opposite end of the stick against oppression.

This study does have some limitations. First, this study is based on one year data, and there are methodological limitations that it has failed to verify the temporal precedence among the variables, which is one of Mill's (1848) three conditions of causality. A longitudinal analysis using panel data to attest temporal precedence of causality will have to be conducted in the subsequent studies. Second, the



data used in this study to describe the concept of oppression presented by Young utilized five elements in the survey: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. However, the survey questionnaires used in this research are not the questions originally created to measure oppression concept proposed by Young, thus, the accuracy of measurement will need to be supplemented in the follow-up studies. Third, measuring occupational status which is one of 3 independent variables under socioeconomic status, this study used a question 'position at work' which only targets respondents that answered in the previous question that they are salary workers. This as a result excludes independent proprietors and unpaid family workers. This study only used the answers among salary workers to divide the level of occupational status because it is hard to compare whose occupational status is higher

between salary workers and independent proprietors without further information on the business sector that respondents' occupation belongs to. In order to increase diversity of response by including wider range of occupational status, the measurement will need to be supplemented in the follow-up research.

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