

Policy Report 2020-15

Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing Determinants, and Policy Implications

Kim, Moon-Gil



People
with People
in Mind



KOREA INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS



KIHASA
KOREA INSTITUTE FOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

【Project Head】

Kim, Moon Gil
Research Fellow
Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs

Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing
Determinants, and Policy Implications

© 2020

Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs

All rights reserved. No Part of this book may
be reproduced in any form without permission
in writing from the publisher

Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs
Building D, 370 Sicheong-daero, Sejong city
30147 KOREA

<http://www.kihasa.re.kr>

ISBN: 978-89-6827-708-5 93330



I. Introduction	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Research Structure and Method	7
II. Changing Perceptions of Social Cohesion	9
1. Perceptions and Psychology	11
2. Images of Society	12
3. Role of the Government	14
III. Preconditions for Social Cohesion	17
1. Preconditions for Social Cohesion	19
2. Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Sex and Age	22
IV. General Assessment	29
1. Determinants of Perceptions of Social Cohesion	31
2. Perceptions of Inequality and Social Cohesion	44
V. Conclusion	55
1. Research Findings	57
2. Policy Implications	60
References	63

List of Tables

〈Table 3-1〉 Preconditions for Social Cohesion (2016 and 2019)	21
〈Table 3-2〉 Rankings of Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Sex (2016 and 2019)	24
〈Table 3-3〉 Rankings of Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Age (2016 and 2019)	26
〈Table 4-1〉 Variables and Components of Social Cohesion	33
〈Table 4-2〉 Variables of Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2016)	38
〈Table 4-3〉 Variables of Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2019)	39
〈Table 4-4〉 Preconditions for Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2016)	41
〈Table 4-5〉 Preconditions for Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2019)	43
〈Table 4-6〉 Comparison of Components of Social Cohesion on Perceptions of Social Cohesion	44

List of Figures

KOREA INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS



[Figure 2-1] General Perceptions of Social Cohesion (2016 to 2019) · 12	
[Figure 2-2] Perceptions of the Five Images of Korean Society (2016 to 2019)	13
[Figure 2-3] Perceptions of the Government's Role (2016 to 2019)	16
[Figure 4-1] Perceived and Preferred Income Distributions	47
[Figure 4-2] Perceived and Preferred Income Distributions by Demographic Group	48
[Figure 4-3] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Intergenerational Income Elasticity	51
[Figure 4-4] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Social Trust	52
[Figure 4-5] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Social Cohesion ·	53



I

Introduction

1. Introduction
2. Research Structure and Method

I Introduction

1. Introduction

(1) Research Background

Fairness was the central keyword of many social and political debates in South Korea in 2019. The very topic has come to dominate public opinion on so many issues in the country. The controversies over unfairness witnessed in the university admissions and career-making of the children of well-known politicians and high-level civil officials destroyed young Koreans' belief in the meritocracy of the system. The collapse of faith in fairness, in turn, has been fueling growing cynicism about hard work and integrity, the two psychological principles that have underpinned Korea's economic and social development. Witnessing how the social and economic clout of parents could give their children a significant advantage at crucial moments in life frustrated and infuriated Koreans.

Fairness and justice have been dominating much of the public discourse in Korea over the last few years. The Hyehwa Station incident, for example, ignited a new wave of feminism, with women rising up against the countless obstacles they face on a daily basis. The growing feminist movement, in turn, has

4 Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing Determinants, and Policy Implications

coalesced young men in their 20s together, giving them the shared cause of fighting against “reverse discrimination” and newly shaping their attitudes toward ideology and policy. Youth unemployment, a chronic problem that the Korean government has been battling for years, shows no signs of abatement and amplifies the worries that today’s young Koreans may be the first generation in Korean history to be poorer than their parents. The problem of intergenerational justice has come to the fore, with the middle-aged perceived to wield comparatively much greater wealth and influence than the young. Others have countered that emphasizing the intergenerational inequality problem runs the risk of overshadowing the equally pressing need to talk about intragenerational inequality as well as inequality that permeates all structures of Korean society. Making these problems worse is the tendency of these issues to induce hateful, discriminatory, and violent speech and behavior from the groups involved. Instead of acknowledging their responsibility to contribute to calming these conflicts, politicians actively exploit the explosive nature of these issues to their advantage, as do the sensationalism-addicted media and press.

All these dominant issues—unfairness, inequality of opportunity, gender conflict, intergenerational inequality, intragenerational inequality, and discrimination and hate—are simultaneously the causes and outcomes of the failure of Korean society to achieve

a necessary level of cohesion. Perceived inequality and the threatened faith in fairness fuel embitterment, which then compromises individuals' life satisfaction, happiness, trust in public authorities, and support for policy, while intensifying hatred, suicidal thoughts, depression, and other pathological outcomes (Yu, 2019). Inequality "causes real suffering, regardless of how we choose to label such distress" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2019, pp. 107-108). This abstract concept exerts a very concrete and adverse impact on the happiness and general wellbeing of the entire people.

Identifying and ascertaining, with empirical tools, how citizens understand and perceive inequality and related issues therefore plays a pivotal role in policy research on social cohesion. Over the last five years, we, at the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA), have been assessing the effects of policy programs on social cohesion in Korea, organizing opinion surveys to gather empirical data, and subjecting the gathered data to detailed analyses aimed at revealing the interactions among the major factors involved and their causal relationships to social cohesion. We have been using our analyses to propose and delineate necessary policy changes toward promoting social cohesion. Although we have addressed a variety of topics related to social cohesion over the years, we have yet to develop a systematic approach that encompasses all three components of social cohesion, i.e.,

social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility. In fact, among the numerous reports that we have written and published over the last five years, Yeo et al. (2015) is the only report to have addressed at least one of these components (i.e., social mobility).

This report is an abridged version of *A Study on Assessment of Social Cohesion Status with Policy Implications* (2019), Moon Gil Kim et al., Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs.

(2) Research Purpose

The purpose of this report is to render a systematic assessment of the current state of social cohesion in Korea and draw policy implications, focusing specifically on the three components. To that end, this report attempts to do the following. First, it ascertains changes in Koreans' perceptions of social cohesion and related topics over the years. Second, it observes changes, over the years, in the list of conditions Koreans have held as prerequisites for social cohesion, and identifies policy implications. Third, it explores and determines the correlations between social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility, as well as related variables, on the one hand, and Koreans' perception of social cohesion, on the other, providing a general account of the current state of social cohesion in Korea.

2. Research Structure and Method

(1) Research Structure

This report is structured as follows. In the first part, we identify the background and purpose of our research and introduce our research structure and method. Part II provides an overview of the changes in Koreans' perception of social cohesion. We examine descriptive statistics to determine their correlation to survey respondents' answers to important questions on their perceptions of social cohesion. The chapter also provides a comparison of how the perceptions of social cohesion vary among Koreans in relation to subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, depression, and other major variables related to social cohesion by year, sex, age, and income level (both objective and subjective). It also addresses the key social issues that have informed Koreans' perceptions of social cohesion and their changing perceptions of the role of the government.

Part III explores the changing preconditions or prerequisites for social cohesion held important by Koreans. We organized two specific surveys on these preconditions, one in 2016 and the other in 2019. We group these factors according to the three components of social cohesion, analyze changes over the years, and draw policy implications.

Part IV provides a comprehensive analysis of how the three components of social inclusion, capital, and mobility affect social cohesion. By verifying and ascertaining, using a regression model, the respective influences of major variables representing these three components on social cohesion, we provide an overall assessment of the current state of social cohesion in Korea. We then examine the correlation between social cohesion and related variables, on the one hand, and perceptions of income redistribution and inequality, on the other.

(2) Research Method

At the core of this report are the surveys we have conducted over the last five years on Koreans' perceptions and opinions regarding social cohesion. Our surveys targeted one member of each eligible household, aged from 19 to 75, with the earliest date of birth in that household. In principle, we surveyed eight households in each of the 500 census output areas across Korea. The census output areas were chosen from the 2019 list.



II

Changing Perceptions of Social Cohesion

1. Perceptions and Psychology
2. Images of Society
3. Role of the Government

II Changing Perceptions of Social Cohesion

1. Perceptions and Psychology

We start by examining the changes, over the four years from 2016 to 2019, in respondents' answers to the general questions in our surveys on social cohesion in Korea. Figure 2-1 provides a visual summary of these changes. The percentages of respondents agreeing, using a 10-point scale, with the three general statements on social cohesion, happiness yesterday, and satisfaction with life overall have decreased slightly since reaching their peak in 2017. As for the statement on whether they felt depressed yesterday, the percentage of respondents agreeing was the lowest in 2019.

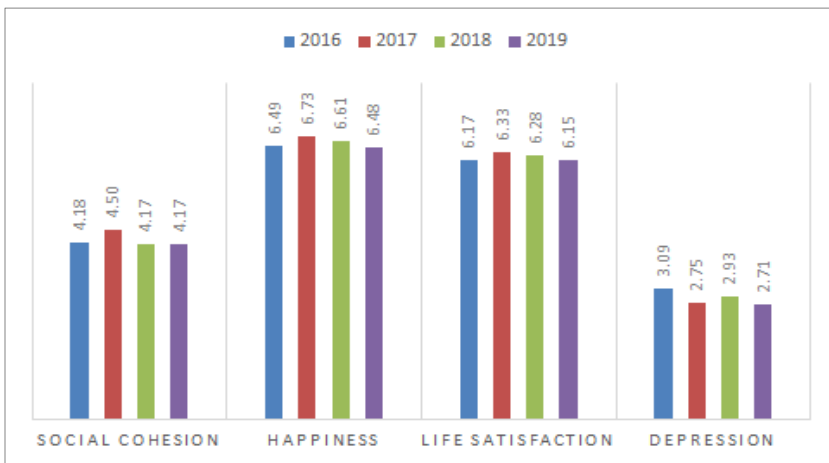
Let us now turn to respondents' answers to each of these statements. In 2019, respondents gave the state of social cohesion in Korea an overall score of 4.17 out of 10 points, below the median (5.0). This score reached its peak in 2017 (4.50), but dropped to the current level in 2018 and has remained there since. Feeling happy yesterday garnered a score of 6.48 in 2019, slightly lower than the 6.73 and 6.61 recorded in 2017 and 2018, respectively. The life satisfaction score, at 6.15, was the lowest in 2019. Feeling depressed yesterday scored 2.71 in 2019, lower than in any of the previous years. While happiness

and life satisfaction dropped somewhat in 2019, depression appears to have fallen as well.

The sentiments on these statements varied somewhat from statement to statement, but were generally more positive among women, young adults, people with higher education, and middle- to high-income households.

[Figure 2-1] General Perceptions of Social Cohesion (2016 to 2019)

(Unit: points)



Sources: KIHASA (2016). Survey on Social Cohesion and Perceptions; KIHASA (2017). Survey on Social Issues and Social Cohesion; KIHASA (2018). Survey on Social Conflicts and Social Cohesion; KIHASA (2019). Survey for Assessment of Social Cohesion.

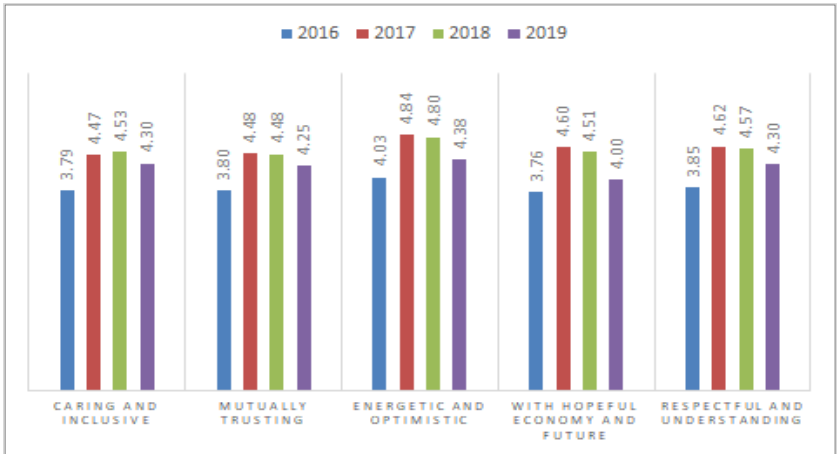
2. Images of Society

Respondents were also surveyed on whether they subscribed to the five specific given images of Korean society and its cohesion. While the percentages of respondents subscribing to

each of these images were higher in 2019 than in 2016, the 2019 percentages were lower than the 2017 and 2018 percentages.

As of 2019, the image of Korean society as “energetic and optimistic” garnered the highest overall score, at 4.38, among the five images presented, followed by “caring and inclusive” and “respectful and understanding,” both of which scored 4.3. “Mutually trusting” came in fourth at 4.25, while “with hopeful economy and future” scored the lowest at 4.0. The fact that all these scores fall short of 5.0, however, suggests that the majority of Koreans do not subscribe to these images of Korea as inclusive, trusting, energetic, and hopeful. In relative terms only, Korean society was perceived as energetic most, followed by inclusive and mutually trusting and, finally, economically hopeful.

[Figure 2-2] Perceptions of the Five Images of Korean Society (2016 to 2019)
(Unit: points)



Sources: KIHASA (2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019).

3. Role of the Government

Respondents were also asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the government's role, specifically in relation to reducing income inequality, providing a decent living for the unemployed, and providing benefits to the poor. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Our analysis below focuses on the percentages of respondents who indicated "agree" and "strongly agree" in response to each statement. Our analysis of respondents' ratings of their responses to the statement on whether the government's role should be reduced, on the other hand, focuses on the percentages of those who indicated "disagree" and "strongly disagree." Taken as a whole, therefore, the higher the percentages of respondents, the greater the support for the government's role.

More than 80 percent of respondents generally felt that income inequality was a serious problem in Korea. Nearly six out of every 10 respondents agreed that the government had a role to play in reducing such inequality. Approximately 50 percent of respondents agreed with the need for governmental support for the unemployed, while only 40 percent or so agreed with the need for public assistance for the poor.¹⁾ In other

1) However, an average of 42 percent of respondents per year disagreed that

words, we may conclude that Koreans generally support the government's role in income redistribution most, followed by support for the unemployed and support for the poor, which they support the least.

Let us examine how respondents' answers to these statements changed from year to year. The percentage of respondents agreeing that income inequality was a serious problem in Korea rose steadily from year to year, reaching 86.5 percent in 2019. Suggesting that Koreans, on the whole, are becoming increasingly sensitive to the issue. The percentage of those agreeing that it was the government's responsibility to reduce income inequality peaked in 2017 at 65 percent, but dropped significantly to 57 percent in 2019. This is rather ironic, as Koreans are more sensitive to income inequality than ever, but also are less supportive of government measures to reduce it. This seeming irony merits further analysis. The percentage of respondents agreeing that the government must provide a decent living for the unemployed also decreased slightly from year to year, falling to 48.7 percent in 2019. Active disagreement with the government's support for the poor was the highest in 2017 at 46.2 percent, but fell continuously afterward, reaching 39.3 percent in 2019.

Women, the middle-aged, the elderly, and high-income households were more aware of income inequality than others.

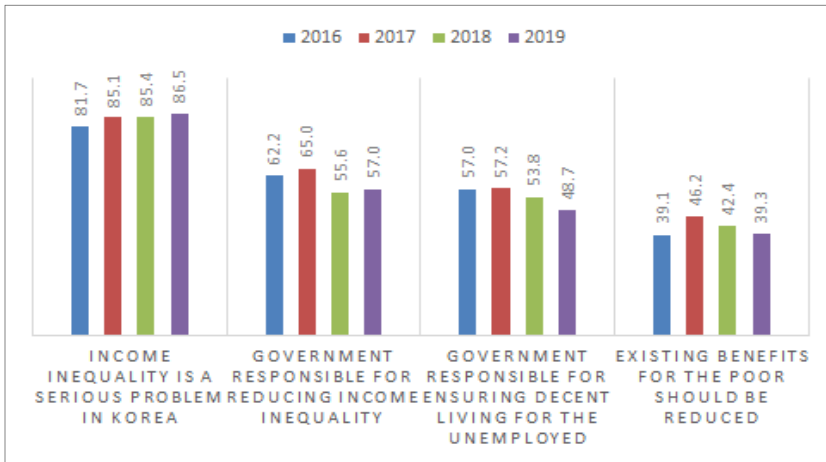
existing benefits for the poor should be reduced.

16 Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing Determinants, and Policy Implications

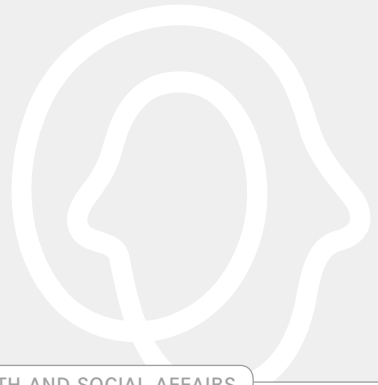
The same groups were also more supportive of the government's role in reducing income inequality than others. There also appears to be some gap in the perception of income inequality and favored solution in correlation to income level.

[Figure 2-3] Perceptions of the Government's Role (2016 to 2019)

(Unit: percentage)



Sources: KIHASA (2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019).



III

Preconditions for Social Cohesion

1. Preconditions for Social Cohesion
2. Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Sex and Age

III Preconditions for Social Cohesion

1. Preconditions for Social Cohesion

Because we had two surveys, in 2016 and 2019, on the preconditions of social cohesion held as important by Koreans, we can examine whether and to what extent Koreans' perceptions of those conditions changed over three years. However, the specific scales of ratings used in the two surveys differ. The 2016 survey presented respondents with a five-point scale, asking them to rate factors that they considered generally important as one, and those that they considered very important as five. The 2019 survey, on the other hand, asked respondents to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the importance of each factor using a four-point scale. One possible way of smoothing out the discrepancy between the scales could be standardizing the answers given on both scales using a 10-point scale. However, this is not a suitable option, because the lowest rating on the 2019 survey was designed to indicate "unimportant," while the lowest rating on the 2016 survey indicated "neutral" (along the lines of "vaguely important"). A better way is to compare the rankings that the different factors scored on the two surveys.

The first- and second-place holders remained unchanged

between the two surveys. The factor assigned first-place importance was “a truly meritocratic society,” followed by “abundance of job opportunities” as the second-place holder. Both factors may be regarded as variables of equality of opportunity. They also correlate to social mobility among the three components of social cohesion. The No. 1 precondition, in particular, goes to the heart of fairness and equality of opportunity that have been dominating public discourses in Korea in recent years. Job opportunities pertain to opportunities in general and social mobility, but also appear to suggest that improving the labor market situation is key to achieving social cohesion.

“A strong middle class,” which ranked in third place in 2016, declined significantly to 11th place in 2019. The middle class problem is, on the surface, an issue of social mobility (Jeong, 2016, p. 42). But it is also an issue of inclusiveness, as a strong and sizeable middle class could come about as a result of making the society more equal and inclusive. Replacing a strong middle class in third place was “strict rule of law” in 2019, a condition vital to restoring trust in public authorities, replenishing social capital, and eliminating corruption and unfairness. This same factor was ranked fifth in 2016.

“All individuals doing their part to the best of their ability” was ranked fourth on both surveys. We grouped this factor in the social capital category (Jeong et al., 2016). “Economic

prosperity” was ranked fifth, suggesting the importance of material conditions for social inclusiveness. A strong middle class, ranked third in 2016, and economic prosperity, ranked fifth in 2019, both constitute material conditions for social inclusion. Although, we could get specific and argue that the former has more to do with redistribution, while the latter has to do with growth.

Of the various preconditions for social cohesion that were presented to respondents, cultural diversity (19th in both 2016 and 2019), gender equality (18th in 2016 and 17th in 2019), and support for the poor (17th in 2016 and 18th in 2019) were factors that were regarded as less important than others. Voting, on the other hand, climbed up the rankings from 16th in 2016 to 13th in 2019.

〈Table 3-1〉 Preconditions for Social Cohesion (2016 and 2019)

Principle	Precondition	2016 ranking	2019 ranking
Mobility/fairness	A truly meritocratic society	1	1
Mobility/opportunity	Abundance of job opportunities	2	2
Mobility/inclusion	A strong middle class	3	11
Social capital	All individuals doing their part to the best of their ability	4	4
Social capital/fairness	Strict rule of law	5	3
Inclusion	Greater equality between regular and irregular workers	6	12
Mobility	Abundance of learning opportunities	7	7
Social capital	Mutual trust between fellow citizens	8	6
Social capital	Willingness to help one another	9	8

22 Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing Determinants, and Policy Implications

Principle	Precondition	2016 ranking	2019 ranking
	instead of being selfish		
Conflict management	Rational resolution of conflicts between competing groups	10	9
Conflict management	Compromise and cooperation between competing groups	11	10
Inclusion	Smaller income gap between the haves and the have-nots	12	14
Inclusion	Economic prosperity	13	5
Conflict management	Active management of conflicts by government	14	15
Social capital	Diversity of relationships and associations among citizens	15	16
Social capital	Active voting	16	13
Inclusion	Public support for the financially struggling	17	18
Inclusion	Greater equality in treatment for men and women	18	17
Inclusion	Respect for cultural diversity	19	19

Sources: KIHASA (2016, 2019).

2. Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Sex and Age

We may compare the different perceptions of the preconditions for social cohesion across different sex and age groups. Recall that respondents were asked to rate their answers on a five-point scale in 2016 and on a four-point scale in 2019. It is therefore impossible to compare the respective scores that the preconditions received in the two years in a simple manner. A more useful approach would be to compare the different rankings of the preconditions by sex and age.

Among men in 2016, “a truly meritocratic society” ranked first,

with a score of 4.36, followed by “abundance of job opportunities” and “a strong middle class.” Women, on the other hand, picked “abundance of job opportunities” as the most important factor, and “a truly meritocratic society,” as the second-most important. Women also ranked “a strong middle class” in third place, as did men. Both men and women also gave the same ranking to “all individuals doing their part to the best of their ability.” We may generalize from these findings that, in 2016, men assigned the highest values to social mobility and fairness as the most important factors of social cohesion, revealing their faith in the importance of meritocracy. Women, on the other hand, assigned the highest values to social mobility and job opportunities.

In 2019, the list of preconditions presented to respondents was increased with the addition of one more factor, “noblesse oblige,” the principle that those who have more ought to do more. This added factor occupied a relatively high place on the rankings (7th). The first- and second-ranked preconditions among men remained the same as in 2016, while third place went to “strict rule of law” instead of “a strong middle class.” “Abundance of job opportunities” retained its first-place ranking among women, as did “a truly meritocratic society” its second-place ranking. Women’s third-place choice also changed to “strict rule of law.” These rankings nonetheless suggest that men still emphasized social mobility and fairness in 2019 as they

did in 2016, while women continued to emphasize social mobility and job opportunities in 2019 as they did in 2016.

In summary, Koreans' respect for fairness and job opportunities as the two most important preconditions for social cohesion remained intact over the three-year span, although the specific rankings differed between men and women. The replacement of “a strong middle class” in third place with “strict rule of law” in 2019 suggests that, in 2019, both men and women assigned a higher value to fairness and justice as a key prerequisite for social cohesion.

〈Table 3-2〉 Rankings of Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Sex
(2016 and 2019)

(Unit: points)

Precondition	2016		2019	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Public support for the financially struggling	3.87	3.90	3.03	3.05
Economic prosperity	4.05	4.06	3.28	3.32
Greater equality of treatment for men and women	3.70	3.85	2.96	3.13
Greater equality between regular and irregular workers	4.11	4.17	3.13	3.23
Smaller income gap between the haves and the have-nots	4.08	4.11	3.11	3.16
Respect for cultural diversity	3.61	3.63	2.75	2.77
Mutual trust between fellow citizens	4.07	4.17	3.27	3.28
Active voting	3.90	3.96	3.15	3.14
Strict rule of law	4.13	4.18	3.34	3.33
All individuals doing their part to the best of their ability	4.13	4.19	3.32	3.31
Noblesse oblige	-	-	3.24	3.27

Precondition	2016		2019	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Willingness to help one another instead of being selfish	4.09	4.14	3.24	3.25
Diversity of relationships and associations among citizens	3.91	3.97	3.06	3.11
Abundance of learning opportunities	4.10	4.15	3.23	3.27
A truly meritocratic society	4.36	4.39	3.45	3.41
A strong middle class	4.16	4.19	3.21	3.25
Abundance of job opportunities	4.33	4.40	3.38	3.46
Rational resolution of conflicts between competing groups	4.08	4.14	3.23	3.24
Active management of conflicts by government	3.96	4.00	3.07	3.18
Compromise and cooperation between competing groups	4.06	4.13	3.20	3.28

Note: The shaded blocks indicate the first- through third-ranked choices. The first-ranked are boldfaced.
 Sources: KIHASA (2016, 2019).

We should also examine the differences in rankings by age. In 2016, young people and seniors picked “a truly meritocratic society” as the No. 1 precondition for social cohesion, followed by “abundance of job opportunities” and “all individuals doing their part to the best of their ability,” in that order. The middle-aged, on the other hand, chose “abundance of job opportunities” as their first choice, “a truly meritocratic society” as their second, and “a strong middle class” as their third.

26 Perception of Social Cohesion, Changing Determinants, and Policy Implications

〈Table 3-3〉 Rankings of Preconditions for Social Cohesion by Age (2016 and 2019)

(Unit: points)

Precondition	2016			2019		
	Young	Middle	Elderly	Young	Middle	Elderly
Public support for the financially struggling	3.92	3.86	3.94	3.08	3.02	3.08
Economic prosperity	4.02	4.06	4.12	3.32	3.29	3.29
Greater equality of treatment for men and women	3.81	3.78	3.68	3.04	3.06	2.96
Greater equality between regular and irregular workers	4.13	4.15	4.13	3.17	3.19	3.17
Smaller income gap between the haves and the have-nots	4.10	4.10	4.07	3.15	3.13	3.12
Respect for cultural diversity	3.64	3.62	3.56	2.77	2.76	2.73
Mutual trust between fellow citizens	4.09	4.13	4.15	3.28	3.30	3.18
Active voting	3.97	3.92	3.87	3.20	3.15	2.99
Strict rule of law	4.14	4.17	4.15	3.37	3.33	3.25
All individuals doing their part to the best of their ability	4.17	4.16	4.16	3.34	3.31	3.26
Noblesse oblige	-	-	-	3.27	3.26	3.22
Willingness to help one another instead of being selfish	4.09	4.12	4.11	3.23	3.26	3.20
Diversity of relationships and associations among citizens	3.93	3.95	3.93	3.06	3.10	3.06
Abundance of learning opportunities	4.17	4.12	4.04	3.30	3.23	3.26
A truly meritocratic society	4.40	4.37	4.36	3.44	3.44	3.40
A strong middle class	4.15	4.20	4.08	3.22	3.25	3.18
Abundance of job opportunities	4.38	4.38	4.27	3.44	3.41	3.40
Rational resolution of conflicts between competing groups	4.12	4.11	4.08	3.27	3.24	3.15
Active management of conflicts by government	3.98	3.97	4.01	3.13	3.14	3.05
Compromise and cooperation between competing groups	4.09	4.10	4.09	3.21	3.26	3.20

Note: The shaded blocks indicate the first- through third-ranked choices. The first-ranked are boldfaced.

Sources: KIHASA (2016, 2019).

By 2019, the age-dependent differences in the rankings had all but disappeared, with “a truly meritocratic society” and “abundance of job opportunities” co-ranked in first place by young people and seniors alike, and ranked first and second, respectively, by the middle-aged. Differences emerged, however, with respect to third place. Whereas young people and the middle-aged picked “strict rule of law,” the elderly chose “economic prosperity.” In other words, in terms of the third-place choices, whereas young people and the middle-aged assigned greater importance to social capital and fairness/justice, the elderly emphasized economic inclusion more.



IV

General Assessment

1. Determinants of Perceptions of Social Cohesion
2. Perceptions of Inequality and Social Cohesion

IV General Assessment

1. Determinants of Perceptions of Social Cohesion

In this section, we sort the factors/variables of social cohesion determined by the opinion surveys into three categories, i.e., social inclusion, capital, and mobility, and explore the correlation of each category to social cohesion perceptions and verify, through regression analysis, how each of the more highly correlated variables influences such perceptions.

Here, we follow the conventional classification of the variables of social cohesion established in the literature. The new variables we have found that have not been addressed in the literature were categorized according to the study on the cognitive structure of social cohesion (Jeong et al., 2016, pp. 52-55). We then set a regression model involving some of the more highly correlated variables of social cohesion perceptions. We apply that model to the analysis of how the leading variables of each of the three categories or components of social cohesion affect social cohesion perceptions, with a view to determining which variables are important in Korea.

(1) Correlations

Table 4-1 shows how the variables of social cohesion perceptions have been categorized. Our social cohesion surveys assessed these variables on a yearly basis. They are all components of the three main components or facets of social cohesion, i.e., social inclusion, capital, and mobility. In 2016, respondents were additionally asked to rate and rank the 19 preconditions for social cohesion. The same question was repeated in the 2019 survey as well, with “noblesse oblige” added as a new variable to the list of preconditions in that year’s survey. On Table 4-1, the left-hand column lists the preconditions for social cohesion, while the right-hand side lists the perceived problems or issues in the current reality that the preconditions are meant to address.

In analyzing the correlation between these variables and social cohesion perceptions, we applied Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients rather than the Pearson correlation coefficients because not all of these variables are continuous variables with normal distributions.

(Table 4-1) Variables and Components of Social Cohesion

Preconditions for social cohesion	Component (category)	Real conditions/issues
Public support for the financially struggling	Social inclusion	Loneliness
Economic prosperity		Inclusive society
Greater equality of treatment for men and women		Subjective poverty
Greater equality between regular and irregular workers		National pride
Smaller income gap between the haves and the have-nots		Women's socioeconomic status
Respect for cultural diversity		Income inequality
Mutual trust between fellow citizens	Social capital	Social trust
Active voting		Mutually trusting society
Strict rule of law		
All individuals doing their part to the best of their ability		Trust in public authorities
Noblesse oblige		Volunteerism
Willingness to help one another instead of being selfish		Charity
Diversity of relationships and associations among citizens		Association and belonging
Abundance of learning opportunities		
A truly meritocratic society	Social mobility	Intergenerational income elasticity
A strong middle class		Intragenerational mobility
Abundance of job opportunities		Intergenerational mobility
		Hopeful society

Note: Respondents were asked to rate each variable on a five-point scale of importance, with zero indicating "not important at all" and four indicating "very important".

Our analysis divides these variables between those that represent the current perception or state of social cohesion, on the one hand, and those that are preconditions for achieving a desired level of social cohesion, on the other.

Variables indicative of the current perception or state of

social cohesion in the area of social inclusion include loneliness, perception of inclusive society, subjective poverty, national pride, socioeconomic status of women, and perception of income inequality. Of these, the one that showed the strongest correlation to perceptions of social cohesion was perception of inclusive society (0.5444), followed by national pride (0.1753), loneliness (0.1460), perception of income inequality (-0.1317), subjective poverty (0.1234), and socioeconomic status of women (0.1018). As for preconditions for social cohesion in the area of social inclusion, greater equality of treatment for men and women emerged with a significant positive correlation to social cohesion perceptions, while most of the other preconditions showed negative correlations. The precondition with the strongest correlation was economic prosperity, which bore a positive correlation.

Of the variables in the social capital category and representing the current perception or state of social cohesion, charity was the only one to emerge with a negative correlation, while all the other variables showed positive correlations. The variable with the strongest correlation was a mutually trusting society. Almost as strong was the correlation borne by social trust (based on answers to the question, "How trustworthy do you think our society is?"). Other variables of social capital bore correlations that lacked statistical significance. All social capital-related preconditions for social cohesion showed

negative correlations to perceptions of social cohesion. This means that, the more important the respondent considered each given precondition, the more likely he/she was to perceive the current state of social cohesion to be lacking, or vice versa. Of these preconditions, willingness to help one another was the one with the strongest correlation.

Social mobility-related variables reflecting the current perception or state of social cohesion include perception of intergenerational income elasticity, intragenerational social mobility, intergenerational social mobility, and optimism for the economy and future. Of these, the last bore the strongest positive correlation to social cohesion. Intergenerational income elasticity and intragenerational/intergenerational social mobility failed to show significant correlations. Among the social mobility-related preconditions for social cohesion, a truly meritocratic society emerged with the strongest positive correlation, followed by abundance of job opportunities and a strong middle class, in that order.

(2) Causal Relationship: Regression Analysis

A. Determinants of Perceptions of Social Cohesion

Let us turn to our regression analysis on the determinants of social cohesion perceptions. The model included the variable

with the strongest correlation from each of the three categories (components) of social cohesion. We also separated the variables representing the current perception or state of social cohesion from others regarded as preconditions for social cohesion. We subjected data from both the 2016 and 2019 surveys to our analysis to identify the trend of changes over time. The variables for sex, age, education, and income were also included in our models so that their effects could be controlled.

We employed a constrained model to determine the relative sizes of the influences exerted by the three components—social inclusion, capital, and mobility—on social cohesion. Specifically, we employed a constrained linear regression model, or the restricted least squares method. This method is favored by researchers who possess given information on certain regression coefficients, which they add to the model so as to improve the accuracy of other estimated regression coefficients (Lee, 2007, pp. 460-461). In our case, we used the constrained model to not only enhance the accuracy of other estimated regression coefficients, but also impose constraints on certain regression coefficients so as to determine correlations between them. In other words, we designed the model so that the sum of the estimated regression coefficients of the variables representing the three components of social cohesion would equal one to enable us to gauge the relative influences of the three components.

Table 4-2 shows that, in 2016, of the three components, social inclusion exerted the greatest influence, followed by social capital and social mobility, in that order. Compared to 2019 (Table 4-3), the perceived influence of social mobility appears to have been much lower. In both 2016 and 2019, women were significantly more likely than men to perceive social cohesion, while the middle-aged were significantly more pessimistic about the state of social cohesion than were young people. Respondents with high school education or more also held more positive views of social cohesion than those with middle school education or less. Income was another variable that bore a significant and positive regression coefficient. The higher one's income, the more favorably one viewed the state of social cohesion. Under our constrained regression model, social inclusion accounted for 42.2 percent of the perceptions of social cohesion; social capital, 26.0 percent; and social mobility, 31.9 percent.

(Table 4-2) Variables of Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2016)

Component/variable		Unconstrained re- gression model	Constrained regression model ($\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 = 1$)
Social in- clusion	Perception of in- clusive society	0.2595***	0.4217***
Social capital	Mutually trusting so- ciety	0.1178***	0.2597***
Social mobility	Hopeful econo- my/future	0.1934***	0.3186***
Sex (Male = 0)	Women	0.1284*	0.0863
Age (Young = 0)	Middle-aged	-0.1411*	-0.2536***
	Elderly	-0.0139	-0.2486*
Education (Middle school or less = 0)	High school	0.2176*	0.2318*
	College or more	0.2424*	0.3346**
log (gross income)		0.1225**	0.0524**
Constant		1.1494***	-
N		3,645	
adjusted-R ²		0.2194	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Source: KIHASA (2016).

Table 4-3 shows that, in 2019, the component that exerted the greatest influence on perceptions of social cohesion was social mobility (hopeful economy/future), followed by social inclusion (caring and inclusive society) and social capital (mutually trusting society), in that order. Women again showed a significantly more positive perception of social cohesion than did men. Respondents with high school education, on the other hand, held a more negative view of social cohesion than those with middle school education or less. Respondents with college education or more also held a more negative view of social co-

hesion than those with middle school education or less, albeit not as strongly negative as the view of respondents with high school education. Age and income did not display significant correlations to perceptions of social cohesion.

Our constrained regression model shows that social inclusion accounted for 35.4 percent of the perceptions of social cohesion; social capital, 20.1 percent; and social mobility, 44.5 percent.

(Table 4-3) Variables of Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2019)

Component/variable		Unconstrained regression model	Constrained regression model ($\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 = 1$)
Social inclusion	Caring and inclusive society	0.2352***	0.3543***
Social capital	Mutually trusting society	0.0966***	0.2008***
Social mobility	Hopeful economy/future	0.3276***	0.4449***
Sex (Male = 0)	Women	0.1142**	0.1237**
Age (Young = 0)	Middle-aged	-0.0302	0.0270
	Elderly	-0.1315	-0.0211
Education (Middle school or less = 0)	High school	-0.2028**	-0.1003
	College or more	-0.1805*	-0.1020
log (gross income)		0.0362	0.0155
Constant		1.5375***	-
N		3,889	3,889
adjusted-R ²		0.4324	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Source: KIHASA (2019).

Our regression of the 2016 data on preconditions for social cohesion shows that the precondition related to social inclusion exerted a statistically significant positive effect on respondents' perceptions of social cohesion, while the social mobility-related precondition exerted a significant adverse effect. The social capital-related precondition was shown to hold little significant explanatory power. Respondents who viewed economic prosperity as an important precondition for social cohesion generally perceived the current state of social cohesion in a favorable light. Others who held a truly meritocratic society as the more important precondition, on the other hand, were disposed to think that Korean society was not cohesive. The latter precondition, however, exerted a greater effect. Women once again viewed the state of social cohesion more favorably than did men, while age and education did not emerge with significant explanatory power. The higher the income, the more favorable the view of social cohesion. Our constrained regression model shows that social inclusion accounted for 49.0 percent of the perceptions of social cohesion in this case; social capital, 28.8 percent; and social mobility, 22.2 percent.

(Table 4-4) Preconditions for Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2016)

Precondition		Unconstrained regression model	Constrained regression model ($\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 = 1$)
Social inclusion	Economic prosperity	0.1311***	0.4901***
Social capital	Willingness to help others	-0.0303	0.2878***
Social mobility	Meritocratic society	-0.3416***	0.2220***
Sex (Male = 0)	Women	0.1917**	0.1227
Age (Young = 0)	Middle-aged	-0.0236	-0.0766
	Elderly	0.2277	0.0187
Education (Middle school or less = 0)	High school	0.1924	0.2209*
	College or more	0.1420	0.1855
log (gross income)		0.1609**	-0.0229
Constant		4.0995***	-
N		3,889	
adjusted-R ²		0.0255	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: KIHASA (2016).

Our unconstrained regression model of the 2019 data, on the other hand, showed the social inclusion-related precondition (economic prosperity) to be the precondition with the strongest effect, which was significant and negative. The social capital-related precondition (willingness to help others instead of being selfish) also exerted a significant negative effect. On the other hand, the social mobility-related precondition (a truly meritocratic society) did not display a significant correlation. The positive signs of the regression coefficients of the explanatory variables in the previous model switched to negative

signs in this model, suggesting that the stronger the respondents' support for each precondition, the more negative their views of social cohesion. Respondents who emphasized social inclusion as the key precondition for social cohesion, for example, can be said to hold a more negative view of the current state of social cohesion than those who emphasized social capital as the more important precondition. Women generally held a more positive view of social cohesion than did men. Respondents with high school education or more held a more negative view than did those with middle school education or less. Age and income did not show significant effects. Our constrained regression model, on the other hand, showed that social inclusion accounted for 21.8 percent of the perceptions of social cohesion; social capital, 20.3 percent; and social mobility, 41.1 percent.

(Table 4-5) Preconditions for Social Cohesion and Their Influences on Perceived Social Cohesion (2019)

Precondition		Unconstrained regression model	Constrained regression model ($\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 = 1$)
Social inclusion	Economic prosperity	-0.1210**	0.2181***
Social capital	Willingness to help others	-0.1072*	0.2025***
Social mobility	Meritocratic society	-0.0285	0.4105***
Sex (Male = 0)	Women	0.1350*	0.2975***
Age (Young = 0)	Middle-aged	-0.0728	0.2854***
	Elderly	-0.1780	0.8352***
Education (Middle school or less = 0)	High school	-0.2720**	0.6104***
	College or more	-0.1827*	0.6863***
log (gross income)		0.1201	0.2916***
Constant		5.0694***	-
N		3,889	3,889
adjusted-R ²		0.4324	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

Source: KIHASA (2019).

Table 4-6 compares the effects of the three components of social cohesion on perceptions of social cohesion, as demonstrated by our constrained regression model, between 2016 and 2019. Whereas the social inclusion-related variable exerted the greatest effect (42.2 percent) on social cohesion perception in 2016, followed by social mobility (31.9 percent) and social capital (26.0 percent), social mobility came to the fore (44.5 percent) in 2019, followed by social inclusion (35.4 percent) and social capital (20.1 percent). Social inclusion, in

other words, was the most decisive factor of social cohesion perception in 2016, but gave way to social mobility in 2019.

As for the preconditions for social cohesion, social inclusion also topped the list (49.0 percent) in 2016, followed by social capital (28.8 percent) and social mobility (22.2 percent). In 2019, however, social mobility climbed to first place (41.0 percent), followed by social inclusion (21.8 percent) and social capital (20.2 percent). As with the variables representing the current state or perception of social cohesion, among the preconditions, too, social mobility replaced social inclusion as the most important factor in 2019.

〈Table 4-6〉 Comparison of Components of Social Cohesion on Perceptions of Social Cohesion

(Unit: percentage)

Component	Current state/perception		Precondition	
	2016	2019	2016	2019
Social inclusion	42.2	35.4	49.0	21.8
Social capital	26.0	20.1	28.8	20.2
Social mobility	31.9	44.5	22.2	41.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: KIHASA (2019).

2. Perceptions of Inequality and Social Cohesion

Many have discussed the social costs of inequality. An unequal society harbors and fuels growing social volatility,

leading to increasing uncertainty over economic prospects that undermines economic growth rates. Researchers of late have also begun to pay attention to the psycho-emotional effects of inequality. Wilkinson and Pickett (2019), for example, argues: “The reality is that inequality causes real suffering, regardless of how we choose to label such distress. Greater inequality heightens social threat and status anxiety, evoking feelings of shame that feed into our instincts for withdrawal, submission, and subordination: when the social pyramid gets higher and steeper and status insecurity increases, there are widespread psychological costs” (pp. 107-108). Inequality profoundly affects individuals’ psychology and mental wellbeing and ultimately obstructs social cohesion. Other recent studies on the psychosocial risks of inequality point out that the poor and the deprived tend to be myopic in their perceptions and become more inclined to pursue short-term payoffs at the cost of long-term gains (Payne, 2017, pp. 88-89). The wealthier, on the other hand, also become hardened in the conviction that they are absolutely right and others who do not share the same view are foolish, hence giving rise to escalating social conflicts (Payne, 2017, p. 133).

Poverty and inequality affect the hearts and minds of people sharing the same society and inevitably affect social cohesion. Poverty and inequality are themselves indicators of, but also detrimental to, social cohesion. However, the literature of the

last five years we have surveyed deals relatively short shrift to these important topics and their role in social cohesion. Although these topics are included as variables of social inclusion in primary studies, they receive little attention in secondary research. For our research project, we included new questions on poverty and inequality with the aim of determining their influences on social cohesion as variables.

(1) Income Distribution: Perception and Attitude

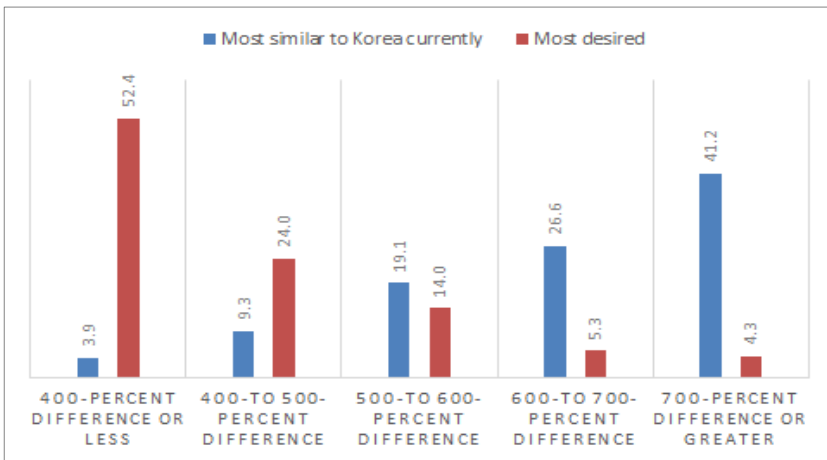
In an effort to identify respondents' perceptions of, and attitude to, income distribution, we presented them with five different distributions of income, with the wealthy and the poor making up different percentages of the population. Respondents were then asked to identify which of these distributions they thought were most similar to the current state of income distribution in Korea, and which distribution they would like to see, regardless of the income they were actually earning. Figure 4-1 shows the results.

As for which of the distributions bore the greatest similarity to Korea's, the fewest respondents (3.9 percent) chose a 400-percent difference or less between the wealthiest and the poorest, while the most (41.2 percent) chose a 700-percent difference or greater. While respondents were not presented with the actual distribution of income in Korea on the survey, the

income quintile share ratio—the difference of income between the top 20 percent and bottom 20 percent—amounted to 1,130 percent in terms of market income and 700 percent in terms of disposable income. As for which of the distributions they would like to see, the majority of respondents (52.4 percent) chose a 400-percent difference or less, while only 4.3 percent chose a 700-percent difference or greater. In other words, Koreans are aware of the inequality of income distribution in Korea, and want to live in a society with far less income inequality.

[Figure 4-1] Perceived and Preferred Income Distributions

(Unit: percentage)



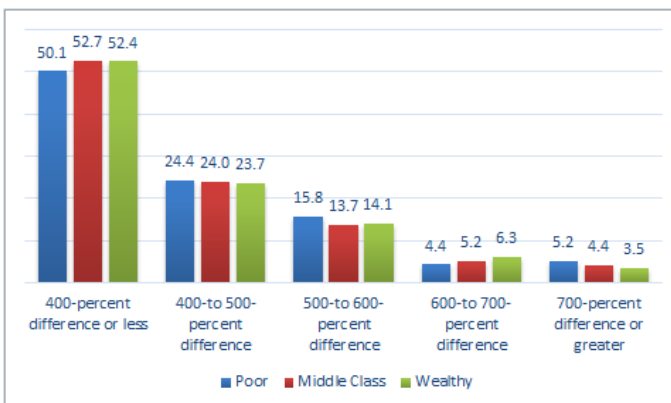
Source: KIHASA (2019).

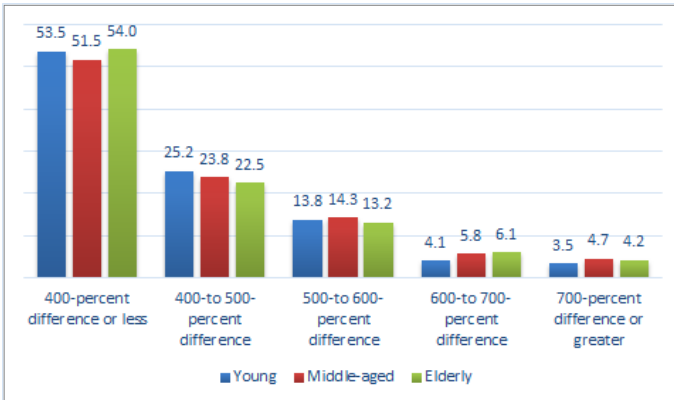
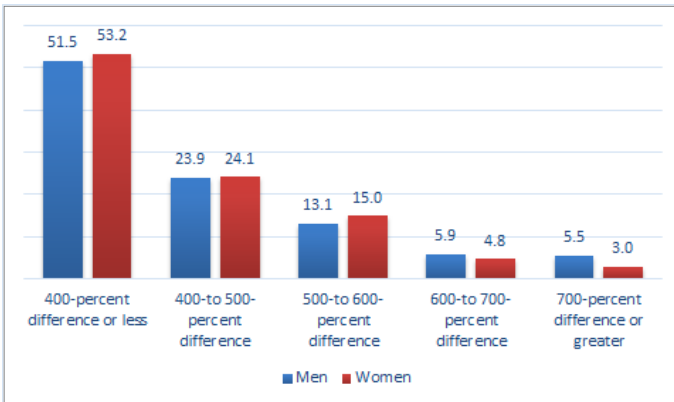
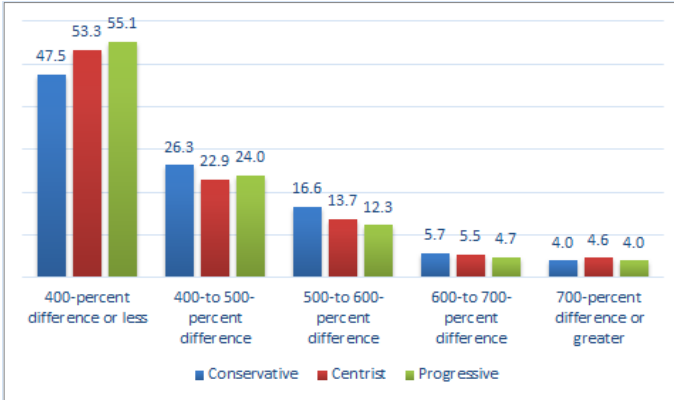
The design of these questions is inspired, in part, by John Rawls’ “veil of ignorance,” which holds that rational persons, ignorant of what conditions they would be living in, would

prefer to live in an equal society if given the choice. Studies on surveys that asked similar questions to Americans indeed confirm that Americans favor an equal society behind the veil of ignorance, and that the preference remains consistent regardless of sex, income, or political/ideological orientation (Norton and Ariely, 2011; quoted in Payne, 2017, pp. 39-41). Figure 4-2 shows differences in preferred income distributions chosen by Korean respondents by respondents' sex, age, income (with the poor defined as having less than 50 percent of median income, the middle class as having 50 to less than 150 percent of median income, and the wealthy as having 150 percent or more of median income), and ideological orientation. The order of preferred income distributions remains consistent irrespective of these differences.

[Figure 4-2] Perceived and Preferred Income Distributions by Demographic Group

(Unit: percentage)





Source: KIHASA (2019).

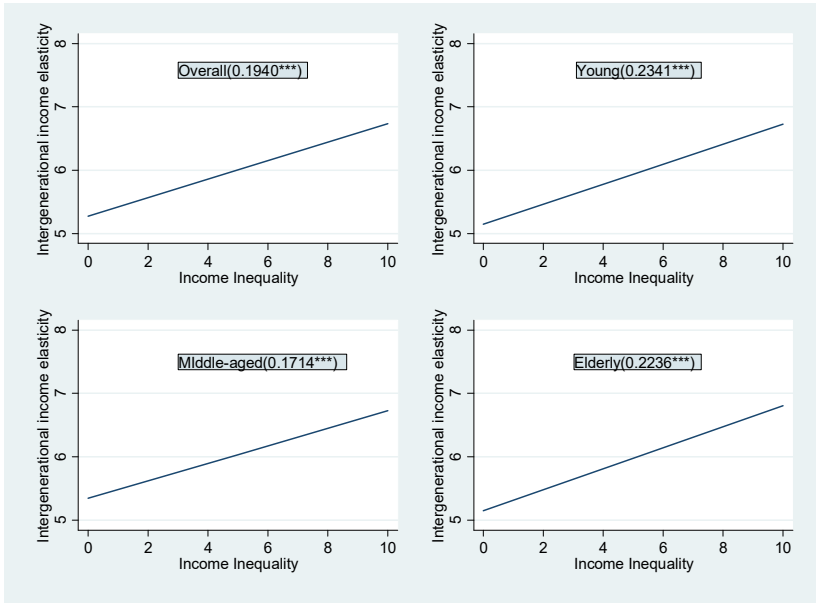
(2) Perceptions of Inequality and Social Cohesion

We now turn to the variables that are known to have correlations to perceptions of income inequality, and examine how perceptions of income inequality affect perceptions of social cohesion, or vice versa.

Figure 4-3 shows how perceptions of income inequality are correlated to perceptions of children's income being affected by parents' income (i.e., perceptions of intergenerational income elasticity). There is generally a positive correlation between the two perceptions, confirming the Great Gatsby curve from Miles Corak, who used it to illustrate the correlation between income inequality and intergenerational social mobility across 13 OECD countries including the US, the UK, Finland, and Sweden (Corak, 2013, p. 82). Corak has used the Gatsby curve to demonstrate that societies with high income inequality also have high intergenerational income elasticity (i.e., weak intergenerational social mobility).

The two types of perceptions also bore positive correlations across all age groups, although the slopes of the curves (i.e., sizes of correlation coefficients) vary by age. The strongest correlation emerged among the elderly (aged 65 to 75), and the weakest one, among the middle-aged (aged 35 to 64). The correlation that emerged among young people (aged 19 to 34) hovers slightly above the overall average, but remains weaker than the correlation shown by the elderly.

[Figure 4-3] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Intergenerational Income Elasticity



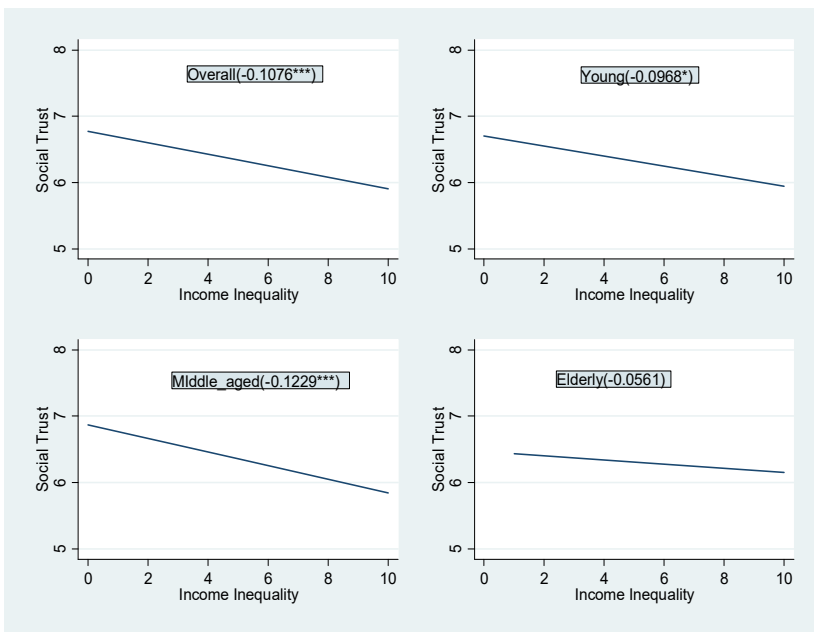
Source: KIHASA (2019).

In their psychological study demonstrating the identical direction of the time series of income inequality and the happiness index, Oishi et al. conclude that, the greater the inequality, the less individuals are able to trust one another, and the greater the chances of unhappiness (Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener, 2011). In our surveys on social cohesion, respondents were asked how they perceived the states of inequality and the trustworthiness of society (social trust) in Korea. We analyzed the correlation between the two perception variables, of which Figure 4-4 provides a visual summary. Overall, there is an

inverse correlation between perceived income inequality and perceived social trust, as has been empirically demonstrated by Wilkinson and Pickett (2012).

The correlation remains inverse across all age groups, but is especially strong among the middle-aged, with considerable statistical significance, while the correlation among the elderly lacked such significance. The correlation among young people was statistically significant, but weaker than the case among the middle-aged.

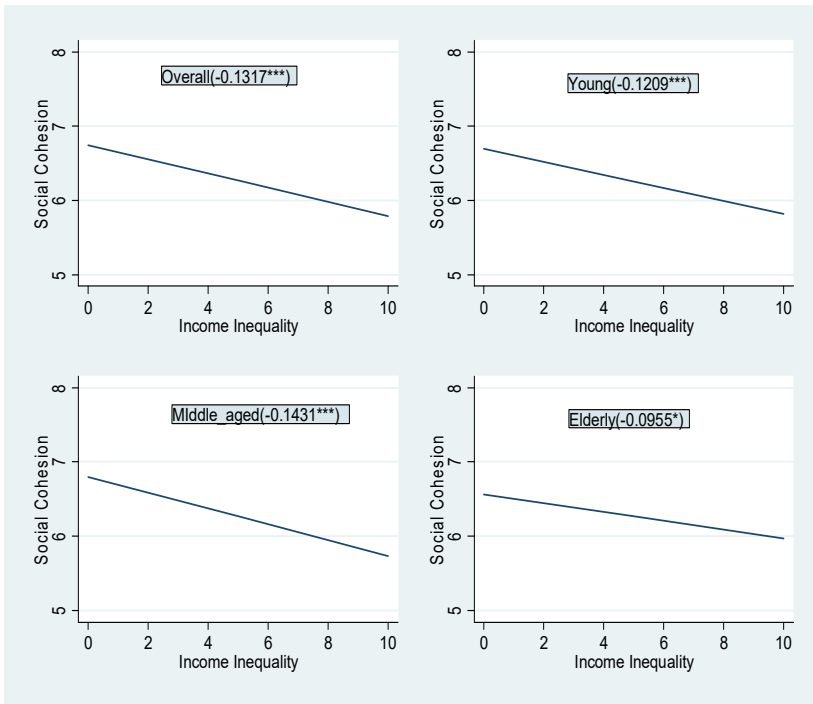
[Figure 4-4] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Social Trust



Source: KIHASA (2019).

We also examined the correlation between perceived income inequality and perceived social cohesion. Figure 4-5 shows that the overall trend is inverse across all age groups. The more unequal one thinks the current distribution of income in Korea is, the lesser one's likelihood of thinking of Korean society as cohesive. The more equal one thinks the current distribution of income is, on the other hand, the greater one's likelihood of viewing Korean society as cohesive.

[Figure 4-5] Perceptions of Income Inequality and Social Cohesion



Source: KIHASA (2019).



V

Conclusion

1. Research Findings
2. Policy Implications

V Conclusion

1. Research Findings

The findings of our analysis on Koreans' perceptions of social cohesion and related subject matters can be summarized as follows. First, the perceived levels of social cohesion, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction reached their peaks in 2017 and have been decreasing gradually since, reaching their lowest levels in 2019. There was also a demographic trend associated with all three levels: namely, that women, young people, and higher-income individuals tended to rate these matters more highly than others. The correlation between respondents' education and perceived social cohesion varied somewhat from year to year, while the highly educated generally reported higher levels of subjective happiness and life satisfaction than the rest. Reported levels of depression (feeling down) were also consistently higher among women, seniors, the under-educated, and the low-income in all years. Although women generally gave higher ratings than men to the perceived state of social cohesion, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction, they were also more inclined than men to feel depressed, suggesting that the mutually exclusive correlation between the two opposing states is weaker among women.

Ratings of perceived social inclusion, social capital, social mobility, and conflict management in Korea similarly peaked in 2017 and decreased afterward. As for perceptions of income distribution and the government's role in income redistribution, perceived income inequality has been rising steadily since 2016, while, paradoxically, the percentage of respondents agreeing that the government should play a role in reducing income inequality has also been decreasing. Support for the government's role in aiding the unemployed and the poor has similarly been weakening.

We also examined preconditions relating to the three components of social cohesion and respondents' perceptions of their relative importance over the years. Whereas preconditions pertaining to social mobility and social capital were high on the rankings in 2016, these gave way to preconditions relating to social inclusion by 2019. A strong middle class as a precondition for social cohesion, for instance, fell in rank from 3rd place in 2016 to 11th in 2019. Economic prosperity, on the other hand, climbed up from 13th to 5th place. While we should not jump to conclusions, it appears that Koreans have generally come to consider economic growth to be a more important factor of social cohesion than income distribution as of late.

Social mobility plays a particularly prominent role in both men and women's perceptions of social cohesion in Korea. In both 2016 and 2019, men were relatively less swayed by

variables of social capital than were women. On the other hand, all three components play roughly equal parts in shaping women's perception of social cohesion. The variables of the current state of social cohesion and preconditions for achieving a desired state of social cohesion also exert contradictory effects on Koreans' perceptions of social cohesion. The former generally bear a positive correlation, while the latter bear a negative one. Policy seeking to strengthen social cohesion should focus on the latter. However, more in-depth research is necessary because, in both the correlation analysis and regression analysis, the explanatory power and significance of the latter consistently remained lower than those of the former.

Our examination of the correlation between the continuous variables of social inclusion, capital, and mobility that both shape social cohesion perception and realize social cohesion, on the one hand, and perceptions of income inequality, on the other, reveals that Koreans' perceptions of social cohesion and social trust in general are inversely correlated, with statistical significance, to their perceptions of income inequality. In other words, the more serious one thinks the state of income inequality is in Korea, the less likely one is to think that Korean society is cohesive or the level of trust is high across it. Perceptions of intergenerational income elasticity, on the other hand, are positively correlated to perceptions of income inequality. This means that those who view that parents'

income plays a decisive role in children's income also disagree that Korean society is cohesive. Although Koreans perceived the state of income inequality to be less serious than it actually is, the majority of Koreans still want to see a more equal distribution of income.

2. Policy Implications

The major trends in Koreans' evolving perceptions of the five images of their society over the past four years include the relative weakening of the positive perceptions held by women, the strengthening of the positive perceptions held by young people, and the strengthening of the negative perceptions held by seniors. The positive perceptions of the highly educated have also grown stronger. These trends suggest that disagreement with the positive images of Korean society is growing stronger among the traditionally disadvantaged. Coupled with the tendency to doubt the state of social cohesion having gained greater awareness of income inequality, these trends also imply the need for a more effective policy on income distribution.

One seeming paradox is that, although Koreans have generally become more perceptive of income inequality as of late, their support of government intervention to reduce it has also waned. This may suggest either that Koreans now more strongly blame the poor for being poor or that Koreans are now

more accepting of income and wealth being concentrated in the wealthy than in the past. One possible interpretation is that Koreans' support for wealth as an outcome of one's merit has grown stronger. More cautious and in-depth review is needed, however, before we conclude how these patterns would affect social cohesion in Korea.

Among the preconditions for social cohesion, respondents in general picked a truly meritocratic society and abundance of job opportunities as the most and second-most important conditions in both 2016 and 2019, respectively. Fairness of employment, in other words, are regarded by many as the most essential conditions for achieving social cohesion. A strong middle class, on the other hand, fell in rank from 3rd place to 11th, while economic prosperity rose from 13th to 5th, and strict rule of law rose from fifth to third. These changes suggest that Koreans now assign greater value to economic growth and fairness of competition than to income distribution as key prerequisites for social cohesion. They also seem to reflect the recent political scandals that engulfed Koreans in the debate on fairness. The development of institutions capable of ensuring equality of opportunity, fair competition, and just outcomes is now at the forefront of policymaking on social cohesion.

Intergenerational income elasticity (social mobility) and social trust (social capital) are major indicators of social cohesion. Perceptions of these three factors confirm the consensus

reached in the empirical literature. Perceptions of social cohesion are, in fact, strongly and inversely correlated to perceptions of income inequality. At least on the cognitive level, income inequality bears an undeniable correlation to social capital, mobility, and cohesion. This finding suggests that the level of a society's cohesion depends on income inequality, and that income distribution policy therefore plays a vital role in forging social cohesion.

It is noteworthy to find that Koreans in general perceive income distribution in Korea as being less unequal than it actually is, but that they would nonetheless prefer to have a more equal distribution. Given the cognitive correlation between income inequality and social cohesion, the less-serious perception of income inequality may mean that Koreans have underestimated the level of social cohesion in their society. The desire, on the other hand, to live in a society with a more equal distribution of income also seems to reflect the desire to see a greater level of social cohesion. Diverse policy measures aimed at reducing social inequality will therefore be necessary for the purpose of social cohesion as well.

Our analysis of Koreans' perceptions of, and attitude (preferences) regarding, income distribution also suggests that it is important to implement measures for improving income redistribution toward achieving greater social cohesion.

References

KOREA INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS



- Kim, M., Yeo, Y., Kim, T., Jeong, H., Woo, S., and Kim, S. (2014). Assessment of Social Cohesion and Countermeasures: Social Cohesion and Happiness. KIHASA.
- Yeo, Y., Jeong, H., Kim, M., Kim, M., Kang, J., Woo, S., and Kim, S. (2015). Assessment of Social Cohesion and Countermeasures II: Social Cohesion and Social Mobility. KIHASA.
- Jeong, H., Kim, M., Yeo, Y., Kim, M., Woo, S., and Kim, S. (2016). Assessment of Social Cohesion and Countermeasures III: Perceptions of Social Cohesion. KIHASA.
- Jeong, H., Kim, M., Yeo, Y., Jeon, J., Kim, M., Woo, S., and Choi, J. (2017). Assessment of Social Cohesion and Countermeasures IV: Social Problems and Social Cohesion. KIHASA.
- Jeong, H., Kim, M., Yeo, Y., Kim, S., Ryu, Y., Woo, S., and Kim, G. (2018). Assessment of Social Cohesion and Countermeasures V: Social Conflicts and Social Cohesion. KIHASA.
- Corak, M. (2013). Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(3): 79-102.
- OECD. (2011). *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: social cohesion in a shifting world*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Payne, K. (2017). *The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die* (Lee, Y. tr.). Wiseberry (originally published in English in 2017).
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The Spirit Level - Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York, Berlin, London:

Bloomsbury Press.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2019). *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being* (Lee, E. tr.). Saenggakieum (originally published in English in 2018).

Xavier, F., Stephan, L., & Frances M.T.B. (2018). Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. *Innovation The European Journal of Social Science Research*.