



# Factors affecting likelihood of hiring private investigators (PI): Citizens' traits and attitudes toward police and PI<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify factors affecting citizens' likelihood of hiring private investigators (PI) for resolving their criminal and/or civil matters. Limited research has been conducted to investigate factors relevant to private investigators, but none of prior studies have studied citizens' characteristics and attitudes toward police and PI in this regard. To fill the void of the literature, this study utilized data collected from 225 Korean citizens. Factors examined include citizens' demographics, desire for personalized justice, attitudes toward PI's investigation, fear of crime, and attitudes toward public police. Findings indicate that citizens' desire for personalized justice was the most significant factor affecting likelihood of hiring PI for different types of cases. Results of the finding also showed that citizen's satisfaction with police work was negatively related with likelihood of hiring PIs for their criminal and/or civil cases. Based on results, policy implications for law enforcement were discussed.

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*Keywords:* Private investigation; Personalized justice; Fear of crime; Private policing

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## 1. Introduction

Privatization of policing is not a new issue in criminal justice field, particularly in Western countries, such as England and the U.S. Based on the notion of self-help, private policing business traditionally has been widely accepted and practiced in private sector of civil and criminal justice systems in those countries (Becker, 1974). Even further, some argued that there would be no police tasks which could not be privatized (Chaiken and Chaiken, 1987). As results, private investigation business is well established in those countries (Gill and Hart, 1996). For example, a magazine in the field of private investigation claims that there are approximately 60,000 private investigators working in the U.S. ([www.pimagazine.com](http://www.pimagazine.com)). Also, by recent year, there are at least nine different national and regional investigator organizations in the U.S. ([www.theprivateinvestigatordirectory.com](http://www.theprivateinvestigatordirectory.com)).

In South Korea, private policing has been rapidly growing. More specifically, Lee (2004) showed that the growth rates of private policing were 55% from 1980 to 1985, 194% from 1985 to 1990, and 104% from 1995 to 2000 (Lee, 2004). According to Lee (2004), economic affluence increased availability of private policing. During the political development influenced by westernization, South Korean society gradually adopted litigation-based legal culture and decentralization of police authority to private sectors (Lee, 2004). He anticipated that needs of private policing would be even greater in a forthcoming new decade. Although his study did not differentiate private investigation (hereafter referred as PI) from private policing, it is certain that PI business has also been grown. Research on private investigation, then, is unavoidable prerequisite for structuring sustainable PI system for the future, particularly in South Korea, where PI business is at its early stage. Moreover, understanding factors potential clients may consider when they need to hire private investigators would be beneficial for PI business as well as public police.

Prior research on PI, however, has been limited.<sup>1</sup> Among about 70 articles and books on PI published between 1971 and 2010, majority of the studies focused on historical development of PI (e.g., Gill and Hart, 1996, 1997a,c; Johnston, 1992; Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971, 1972; Lee, 2004; Marling, 1995), philosophical and legal regulation issues (Becker, 1974; Gill and Hart, 1997c; O'Connor et al., 2008; Prenzler and King, 2002; Shearing, 1992), job specification (Prenzler and King, 2002), ways of increasing cooperation between police and PI (e.g., An, 2007; Choi, 2006; Cunningham and Taylor, 1985; LEAA, 1977; Shearing, 1992), and functions of PI in a society (e.g., Alarid and Montemayor, 2010; Reichman, 1987; Reiss, 1988; Shearing and Stenning, 1983). A few empirical research focused on attitudes of police toward private investigators (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971; Scott and McPherson, 1971; Shearing et al., 1985), and some examined private investigators' perception toward police cooperation (Gill and Hart, 1997a; Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971). None of prior studies, however, has examined citizens' attitudes toward and preference for PI as an alternative to public policing. As noted by Gill and Hart (1999), demand of citizens for circumnavigating formal criminal justice systems of due process to achieve their personal goals is the most distinct matter

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<sup>1</sup>Since private security is different from private investigation, this study excluded literature on private security from its review. As a broad concept, privatization of policing means that private citizens or groups take place of public police in terms of carrying out tasks and roles of public police (Forst and Manning, 1999). Roles of police can be divided in to three; law enforcement, peace-keeping, and providing service (Forst and Manning, 1999; Wilson, 1968), and two major functions privatized are investigation (i.e., private investigation) and crime prevention activities (i.e., private security). Therefore, in this study, private investigation is differentiated from private security. For example, when they estimated magnitude of private security sector, Jones and Newburn (1995) excluded private investigation sector from private security sector.

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