



COVID-19 Crisis and Women in Asia

Reflections from COVID-19 and the Prospects for
Gender Justice in South Korea

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | i |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Methodology | 7 |
| COVID-19 Impacts on Gender Equality | 9 |
| Identification of Relevant Areas of Intervention | 11 |
| Learning from the COVID-19: Future Policy Approaches for Gender Justice | 13 |
| Summary and Recommendation | 15 |
| References | 17 |

Executive Summary

This study analyses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected gender equality in the South Korean labour market, by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, we examined the effect of COVID-19 on the change in economic-activity status by gender and occupational class in South Korea (hereafter Korea) by multinomial logistic regression analysis. The overall results show that the pandemic had a negative impact on women's labour-market participation, presenting a high rate of movement from employment to economically inactive during the COVID-19 crisis due to unpaid care and domestic work. Second, we identified the impact of COVID-19 on the working conditions and job quality

of the female essential workers, focusing on hospital cleaners and care workers through in-depth interviews. Working conditions for female essential workers in Korea were already poor, demanding high levels of performance while providing poor levels of resources. As working conditions would not have changed, their experience as essential workers during the pandemic is likely to have brought additional demands on their work and possibly further constrained the resources available. Based on these results, the implications on future policy approaches for gender justice and role of feminist organizations in policymaking were discussed.

Introduction

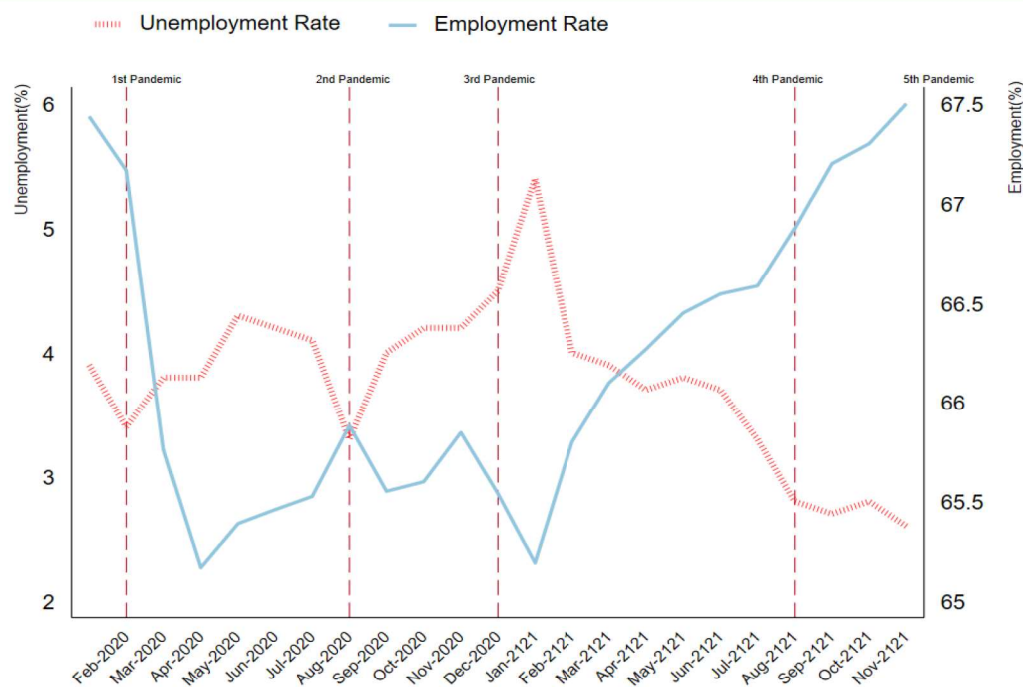
The overall impact of the pandemic on labour market in South Korea

The COVID-19 pandemic caused negative effects on the global economy. Measures such as self-isolation, social distancing, and closure of public facilities had a direct impact on the economy and indirect adverse effects such as fall in employment and a rise in corporate bankruptcies. In the case of the South Korean (hereafter Korea) labour market, as of August 2020, there were 274,000 fewer employed people than the same month the previous year (Statistics Korea, 2020). This decrease is larger than that of the global financial crisis in 2008, and than the first two months after the Korean financial crisis in 1997. The number of employed declined in all industrial sectors, but it was particularly striking the accommodation and restaurant sector, health and social work sector, and education sector, similar to the global trend. After the third COVID-19 pandemic peaked, the employment rate fell to 65.2 per cent in January 2021, and the unemployment rate increased to 5.4 per cent (see Figure 1).

Since then, however, the employment rate has risen. As of November 2021, the changes in the number of employed compared to the same month the previous year are as follows (Statistics Korea, 2021). First, by industry, increases occurred in the health and social welfare service sector (11.6 per cent), the transportation and warehouse sector (9.8 per cent), and the information and communication sector (12.6 per cent). On the other hand, decreases occurred in the lodging and restaurant businesses sector (-4 per cent), wholesale and retail sector (-3.5 per cent), arts and leisure-related services sector (-4.6 per cent), as well as other personal services sector (-4.1 per cent). Next, by employment status, COVID-19 had a significant impact on nonstandard employment and self-employment, specifically on daily workers and unpaid family workers.

The labour market trends as of October 2021 based on the administrative statistics of employment insurance subscription presented disparities between different occupations (Ministry of Employment and Labour,

Figure 1: Changes in employment and unemployment rates



Source: Statistics Korea (2019, 2020, 2020)

2021). After the peak of the pandemic, the number of employment insurance subscribers increased mainly in the manufacturing industry due to improved domestic demand and strong exports. Yet, that of face-to-face service jobs in the service sector decreased. Still, employment insurance subscribers increased in most industries, due to increased non-face-to-face demand and digital conversion policies. Looking at the changes in the number of employment insurance subscribers (unemployment insurance coverage) in the service industry, most industries such as social welfare, education services, and publishing increased. Also, that of land transportation, air transportation, lodging and hotels, food and beverage services decreased compared to the previous year.

Unemployment, potential unemployment and pure economically inactive status by gender

In Korea, people with the official status of unemployed are considered to be those who were not in employment during the reference period and actively searched for work in the previous four weeks and who would be able to work immediately if given a job, according to Statistics Korea. While unemployment is a significant indicator of labour market crisis, the limitation of using the official unemployment rate in Korea has also been pointed out since it does not reflect the actual labour market situation properly in two respects (Hwang, 2010). First, the number of unemployed people is underestimated. Korea's low unemployment rate is often attributed to the high number of economically inactive people, which is not included in the official unemployment rate, and among whom most may share common characteristics with the unemployed group. For example, a number of Korean youth groups preparing for company entrance exams are not counted as unemployed, but as economically inactive. Second, the unemployment rate does not correctly reflect the volatility of the labour market. When the economy is not stable, and the number of jobs declines, only a small number of the unemployed are categorized as officially unemployed, while the rest are considered as either potentially or partially unemployed (Hwang, 2010: 120).

Therefore, to reflect the overlap between unemployment and the economically inactive population, Korea Statistics term this group as "potential unemployment",

following the standard laid out by the International Labour Organization. Among the three attributes of unemployment, "available for work" and "seeking work" are the standards that distinguish the unemployed from the economically inactive population (see Table 1). In 2021, potential unemployment in Korea was approximately 1.9 million, so the population who are in the overlap between the unemployed and the economically inactive population is twice that of the unemployed (approximately 1.04 million) (Statistics Korea, 2022a). This shows that a large proportion of people who lose their jobs are included in the economically inactive population rather than being of unemployed status. Specifically, when people lost their jobs in the 2008 financial crisis, those who had been in permanent employment were more likely to be classified as officially unemployed, while those who had been in temporary employment were more likely to be classified as potentially unemployed (Hwang, 2010). Concerning gender, because female workers in Korea are concentrated in nonstandard employment (i.e., non-regular or temporary work), the risk they face from employment shocks may not be fully captured by the official unemployment rate.

Finally, people in "pure economically inactive" status refer to people who are not employed, not seeking work, and not available for work in Korea (see Table 1). The proportion of those who are purely economically inactive within the total economically inactive population is approximately 88.7 per cent (14,872,000 people) in 2021 (Statistics Korea, 2022a). Moreover, there is a gender gap in the coverage rate of employment insurance for wage earners in Korea (Statistics Korea, 2022b). As uninsured workers do not receive unemployment benefits even if they are unemployed, many female workers in the blind spot of unemployment insurance may have less incentive to actively seek work when they lose their job. Therefore, it is frequently observed that women move directly from employed status to economically inactive status without going through the unemployment stage (Hwang, 2010). Considering aggravated care work and the traditional gender division of labour in child-rearing and housework (Forsythe, 2020), women might be more likely to move into the economically inactive classification in an employment crisis.

Table 1. Concepts of unemployment, potential unemployment, and pure economically inactive status

| Criteria | Within economically active population | Economically inactive population | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| | Unemployment | Potential Unemployment | | Pure economically inactive |
| | | Seeking, not available | Not seeking, but wanting and available | |
| Without work | O | O | O | O |
| Available for work | O | X | O | X |
| Seeking work | O | O | X | X |

Source: Reorganized sources from ILOSTAT (2022) and Statistics Korea (2022a)

Work logic and skill level by gender

In Korea, the service sector has rapidly increased since the 1990s, and the shift in industrial structure toward a service economy is thought to be closely related to the expansion of female informal work, as it is often women who are employed as low-skilled service workers (Baek, 2014; Lee and Kim, 2020). A gender dimension is identified in the change in industrial structure, with high demand for female labour in the service sector, which also has a prevalence of low-paid and informal jobs. Whilst studies analysing the link between sectoral segregation and the gender gap highlight how females are concentrated in low-skill service occupations with low wages and weak employment security, limited studies have been conducted on how the interpersonal work logic in the service sector affects employment security. Yet, especially during the pandemic, the characteristics of labour in this sector, such as the demand for face-to-face work and the impossibility of working from home, not only threaten the health rights of workers but are also associated with the risk of being laid off.

Specifically, during COVID-19, it was relatively easy for some workers to switch to remote working or telecommuting. However, many workers became unemployed or economically inactive because they could not perform their regular work at home (Bick et al., 2020). The lack of possible telecommuting (which can vary depending on the demand for face-to-face

interaction at work or the degree of digital intensity) can be considered a new occupational hazard (Avdiu and Nayyar, 2020; Pouliakas and Branka, 2020). According to the analysis in this context, the key characteristics of workers in the “very high-risk” group are that face-to-face contact with others in their workplace is inevitable and physical proximity is very high. This group includes care workers, sales workers, personal service workers, hospitality and retail managers, health professionals, food preparation helpers, and health-associated professionals. The results from the study show that work with a face-to-face work logic can be more vulnerable to unemployment or potential unemployment. Thus, in this study we examine how female workers experience labour market shock by adopting occupational skill level and work logic.

To classify occupations in the service economy, more accurate, recent studies have divided occupational classes by crossing the standards of “work logic” and “skill level” (Häusermann and Schwander, 2009; Oesch, 2006). In this study, the 5th Korean Standard Occupational Classification (KSCO-5) was reclassified by referring to Oesch’s (2006) occupational classification scheme¹ (see Table 2<Table 2>). First, in terms of skill level, professional/manager and semi-professional/manager jobs were classified as high-skilled occupations, and general and unskilled as low-skilled occupations, according to Oesch (2006). Next, in terms of work logic, work experience in most service sectors is based on interpersonal services such as caring for

¹ Oesch (2006) classified highly skilled and low-skilled workers according to their skill level and divided them into independent, technical, organisational, and interpersonal work based on work logic. In other words, by crossing these two axes, he divided occupational classes in the service sector into fifteen categories: such as higher-grade managers and administrators/associate managers and administrators, technicians, sociocultural professionals/sociocultural semi-professionals, clerks, blue-collar workers of skilled crafts, routine agricultural workers, and low-skilled service workers.

Table 2: Occupational classification by skill and work logic

| Work logic Skill level | Non-face-to-face work logic | Face-to-face work logic |
|--|---|--|
| Highly skilled (professional/manager and semi-professional/ manager jobs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-face-to-face and highly skilled occupations • Technical experts (e.g. mechanical engineers, computing professionals) • Technicians (e.g. electrical technicians, safety inspectors) • Higher-grade managers and administrators (e.g. financial managers, public service administrators) • Associate managers and administrators (e.g. managers in small firms, tax officials) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face and highly skilled occupation • Socio-cultural professionals (e.g. university teachers, medical doctors) • Socio-cultural semi-professionals (e.g. primary school teachers, social workers) |
| Low-skilled (general and unskilled jobs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-face-to-face and low-skilled occupations • Skilled crafts (e.g. machinery mechanics, carpenters) • Routine operatives (e.g. assemblers, machinists), Routine agriculture (e.g. farm hands, loggers) • Skilled office (e.g. secretaries, bank tellers) • Routine office (e.g. mail sorting clerks, data entry clerks) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face and low-skilled occupations • Skilled service (e.g. cooks) • Routine service (e.g. home helpers, shop assistants) |

Source: Reorganized based on Baek (2014), Oesch (2008), Häusermann and Schwander (2009: 11)

others and advising clients; thus, interpersonal work logic is the factor that best reveals the characteristics of the service economy. Furthermore, it requires social skill, which is the ability to communicate and interact with people, that workers in service occupations must possess regardless of their qualifications. Therefore, we integrated the technical and organisational work logic from Oesch's occupational classification scheme as non-face-to-face work logic and divided the occupational groups into face-to-face jobs and non-face-to-face jobs, to investigate changes in economic activity associated with different work logics. During COVID-19, occupational groups with face-to-face work logic had a higher risk of infectious disease (Lee and Kim, 2020) and were less likely to maintain the same level of employment status (Ham, 2021).

The major policies and legislations in Korea: Focusing on the essential workers

The Korean government's response to COVID-19 may be evaluated as successful in terms of quarantine but relatively low in terms of budgetary investment. The Korean government's expenditure on responding to COVID-19 was around 6.4 per cent of gross domestic

product (GDP). Compared to 25.5 per cent in the U.S. and 16.7 per cent in Japan, Korea's spending on responding to COVID-19 was very low (IMF, 2021). An especially sharp dividing line emerged between those who worked in occupations and sectors deemed vital to the functioning of our everyday lives, physically presenting themselves in the workplace – often referred to as “essential workers” – and those that were not. Therefore, the government implemented several policies and legislations to support and protect essential workers.

Starting with the implementation of the Ordinance on the Protection and Support of Essential Workers at Seongdong-gu (a district of Seoul) in September 2020, measures to support and protect workers in essential sectors at the district and provincial level were implemented by several local governments. Following these measures by local governments, the Korean government announced the Protection and Support Measure for Essential Workers in December 2020, to counter the persisting situation that poor working conditions of essential sectors before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic endanger the safety and maintenance of society. The measure provides protection and support to workers in the essential sectors regarding the risk of infection and industrial

accident, overworking and low income, and exclusion from labour rights and social protections. It defines which sectors count as essential services for the specific reason, as follows: The medical and social services are directly related to protecting lives and physical safety. The delivery, street cleaning and call-centre services are necessary for the maintenance of society with the mandatory quarantine and isolation measures. Finally, transportation services have a massive effect on entire industries at the national level.

Moreover, there was legislation on the protection and support for essential workers. After the outbreak of COVID-19, five legislative bills were introduced for essential workers. Some bills included specific support measures, such as providing an additional incentive, prioritising vaccinations, and expanding social services. Based on those legislative bills, the Act on the Designation and Protection/Support of Essential Services and Workers was enacted in May and implemented in November 2020. It was implemented to institutionalise the government system for defining essential services and workers and implementing protection measures through the Committee for the Designation and Support of Essential Services and Workers. The key contents of the Act are the definition and scope of essential services, the responsibilities of state and local governments, and the composition and operation of related committees, which were the common elements in the previous five legislative bills.

Methodology

This study analyses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected gender equality in the Korean labour market by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, we examined the effect of COVID-19 on the change in economic activity status by gender and occupational class in Korea using multinomial logistic regression analysis. Next, we identified the impact of COVID-19 on the working conditions and job quality of the essential workers, focusing on hospital cleaners and care workers through in-depth interviews.

1) Quantitative approach: Focusing on economic activity status

We examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labour market transitions from: (1) employment to employment; (2) employment to unemployment; (3) employment to potential unemployment; and (4) employment to purely inactive status, by gender and occupational class in Korea. We used the Korean Labour and Income Panel Study (KLIPS) data, which enable us to track transitions in the labour market from 2019 to 2020.² This time period allows us to closely examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market. Thus, the dependent variable is a categorical variable that distinguishes the change in the state of economic activity from 2019 to 2020. Because the dependent variable is a multinomial variable divided into four categories, we conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis with “employment to employment” as the reference category.

Specifically, first we measured the economic activity status of those employed in 2019 (before COVID-19) and then in 2020, to examine the trajectories. In other words, among those employed in 2019, the change in economic activity status in 2020 was measured for four categories: (1) those who maintained their employment status; (2) those who became unemployed; (3) those

who moved to the potentially unemployed group; and (4) those who moved to the purely inactive population group. In addition, by exploring the interaction between gender and occupational class, this study analysed how the change in economic activity status through four trajectories (operationalized as four categorical variables in this study) varied according to the four occupational classes and gender in terms of risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2) Qualitative approach: Focusing on essential workers

We also conducted an analysis using in-depth interviews, among other case-study methods. In-depth interviewing is qualitative research method that asks participants about past experiences, perspectives, issues, values, and influence using semi-structured questions on areas that can be difficult to grasp by observation (Jeon Yeong-kook, 2017). It was considered suitable for understanding the changed working environment of essential workers in Korea due to COVID-19, since it effectively understands past events and memories that are difficult to observe in the present (Kim Young-cheon, 2006). The in-depth interviews were premised on the complete and voluntary consent of the study subjects.³ The interview was conducted in a semi-structured interview method referring to the interview guideline. The contents of the questions consisted of a basic information survey of the study participants, working conditions before and after COVID-19, and hope or aspiration for the future. In this study, hospital cleaners and care workers were selected as essential workers in Korea who provided essential services during COVID-19. The specific list of study participants is organized in Table 3.

² KLIPS has conducted a survey every year since 1998 and is officially approved by the National Statistical Office. In 2020, the 23rd survey was completed. KLIPS is a longitudinal survey conducted to obtain panel micro data on the labour market from which dynamic changes, such as the state of individual economic activity, can be analysed. In 1998, the first KLIPS survey comprised 5,000 households and 13,321 household members. In the 23rd survey, 3,208 households of the original 5,000 households were included. The retention rate from the original sample was 64.2 per cent. In this study, data from the 22nd year (2019, before COVID-19) and the 23rd year (2020, during the pandemic) were used to construct a variable of trajectories in the state of economic activity, which is our dependent variable.

³ In early September 2021, research participants were recruited through expert recommendation, and appropriate research participants were selected through two internal meetings of the research team. As for the interview location, the union office was used if they had one. When it was difficult to use the labour union office, an interview was conducted in a space where the study participants felt comfortable. Each interview took around 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Table 3: List of study participants

| No | Labour Field | Age/Gender | Working Period | Working Area |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| N1 | Hospital cleaner at private hospitals | 53/M | 4 years | Seoul |
| N2 | Hospital cleaner at private hospitals | 63/F | 3 years and 3 months | Seoul |
| N3 | Hospital cleaner at public hospitals. | 62/M | 10 years | Incheon |
| N4 | Hospital cleaner at private hospitals | 58/F | 2 years and 3 months | Gyeonggi Province |
| N5 | Hospital cleaner at public hospitals. | 67/F | 10 years and 10 months | Seoul |
| N13 | Public sector cleaning workers | 58/F | 3 years and 6 months | Incheon |
| N14 | Public sector cleaning workers | 51/F | 1 year and 10 months | Incheon |
| N15 | Public sector cleaning workers | 51/F | 1 year and 3 months | Incheon |

*Interviews of the care workers were separately conducted.⁴

We used the “job demands-resources” model as the framework for analysing the working conditions/job quality of the essential workers. Job demands refer to those physical, psychological and organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological effort. Job resources refer to the physical, psychological, social and organisational aspects of the job that are important for achieving work goals, reducing job demands (Bakker and Demirouti, 2008). The specific analysis consists of two parts; i) Job demand: working conditions and job quality before and during the COVID-19, ii) Job resources: aspects of the job that are important for reducing job demands on workers before and during the COVID-19.

⁴ The care workers analyzed in this study consist of child-care teachers and (after-school) care teachers, classified as workers in social welfare sectors (official category 247) which include long-term care workers at home or in institutions, personal assistants for people with disabilities, and child caregivers, classified as care service workers (official category 4211) under the Korean Standard Classification of Occupations.

COVID-19 Impacts on Gender Equality

The change in economic activity by occupational class and gender

Changes in the state of economic activity (the dependent variable) were as follows (i.e., the proportions for the four categories): Of those employed in 2019, 92.1 per cent remained employed in 2020 (category 1); the proportion of those transitioning from employed to unemployed was 0.8 per cent (category 2); and the proportion of those transitioning from employed to potentially unemployed was 3.5 per cent (category 3). Finally, the proportion of those transitioning from employed to being purely inactive was 3.6 per cent (category 4).

By extending the discussion of how the pandemic has impacted female-concentrated occupations, we examined how the aforementioned trajectories are gendered by skill level and work logic by exploiting the occupational classification scheme of the service economy. We found that men were more likely than women to keep their jobs in all occupational classes and the pandemic had a lower negative impact on non-face-to-face highly skilled jobs. Conversely, the probability of moving from employment to pure economically inactive status was high for women regardless of their occupational class. The detailed explanation for the key results can be summarized as follows:

- First, the probability of moving from employment to unemployment was higher among i) non-face-to-face low-skilled, ii) females, and iii) non-face-to-face low-skilled females. In particular, women in non-face-to-face low-skilled occupations had the highest probability of moving from employment to unemployment. Non-face-to-face low-skilled women were five times more likely to move from employment to unemployment after COVID-19 than non-face-to-face highly skilled men.
- Second, it was found that the highest probability of maintaining employment after COVID-19 was among i) non-face-to-face highly skilled occupational groups, ii) males in general, and therefore in particular among iii) males in non-face-to-face highly skilled positions. In other words, men were more likely than women to keep their jobs in all occupational classes, and the pandemic had a lower negative impact on non-face-to-face highly skilled jobs. Conversely, women in non-face-to-face occupations were the least likely to remain employed, regardless of their skill levels.

- Third, the probability of moving from employment to potential unemployment was higher among i) highly skilled face-to-face occupations, ii) males, and iii) males in low-skilled face-to-face occupations. Although men and women in face-to-face highly skilled occupations had a high probability of moving into potential unemployment (3.3 per cent), face-to-face low-skilled was also found to present high probability (3.0 per cent). In particular, males in face-to-face jobs demonstrated the highest probability (4 per cent) of moving from employment to potential unemployment after COVID-19, irrespective of their skill level.
- Fourth, the probability of moving from employment to pure non-economic activity was higher among i) females, ii) low-skilled face-to-face occupations, and iii) non-face-to-face highly skilled females. In addition, the probability that people in face-to-face low-skilled jobs will move to pure non-economic activity was 3.8 per cent, nearly four times higher than that of the non-face-to-face highly skilled occupations. What is noteworthy is that non-face-to-face highly skilled women were most likely to move to pure non-economic activity at 8 per cent. This is 40 times higher than the probability of non-face-to-face highly skilled male moving to pure non-economic activity (0.2 per cent).

Female essential workers: Focusing on the hospital cleaners and care workers

Hospital cleaners

Cleaning workers, working under an unsystematic arrangement or starting work early and doing high-intensity work, have been suffering from extreme work intensity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic due to increased workload and changes in the method of work. This overlapped with the lack of rest areas and the reduction of actual break time by the quarantine measures that further increased the risk to physical health from accumulating workers' fatigue from long hours of high work intensity. However, despite the increase in work intensity, there was no increase in income level due to the absence of a proper compensation system. Instead, they experienced income instability since they had to purchase personal protective gear at their own expense due to insufficient support from the related organizations. Individualization of the responsibility for

quarantine onto the workers further aggravated their mental health as it led to anxiety among the workers. Furthermore, to enhance quarantine measures, hospitals attempted to strengthen control over each worker inside and outside the workplace, negatively affecting the personal relationship of workers with colleagues and family. Moreover, being infected with COVID-19 was seen as presenting a risk of dismissal for cleaning workers, worsening job insecurity.

The significant job resources for cleaning workers in Korean hospitals were identified as employment and income stability, social resources (labour union, labour law, and social protection system), authority over the content of work, and the nature (public/private) of organizations (hospitals). Yet, it is hard to guarantee employment and income stability for cleaning workers as most of them are working as low-paid, indirectly employed, non-standard workers due to the flow of labour flexibility that has increased since the economic crisis in Korea in the late 1990s. In addition, the gap between statutory and actual retirement age and the age at which they are eligible to receive the National Pension further aggravate income instability. In this regard, female cleaning workers are worse off, as there is very low income security for the elderly from the national old-age pension scheme consisting of the Basic Pension and the National Pension. Meanwhile, the labour union, the vacation system in line with the Labour Standards Act, and social insurance serve as social resources. In some cases experienced protection of the rights and interests of workers through the labour union and received additional income from the vacation system or compensation for unused vacation days. Furthermore, for workers who constantly face physical limitations such as musculoskeletal disorders or respiratory diseases, the Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance (industrial accident insurance) serves as a social resource. Regarding their authority over the content of their work, it is difficult to reduce the demand in workplaces with high-intensity work and dangerous work environments due to the actual difficulties in using the vacation system in the absence of a substitute workforce and the lack of decision-making authority over the order or method of their work. Also, the nature (public/private) of the organizations (hospitals) where they work was identified as an important job resource. Even if the hospital cleaning workers belong to the same employment agency, there is a difference in safety education, the number of personal protection gear provided, and reception of government subsidies for COVID-19, depending on the nature of the organizations where they work.

Care workers

In the case of the job demands for care workers, it was found that high income and employment instability, which already existed before COVID-19, worsened during the pandemic in Korea. The visiting care workers experienced severe job insecurity in which their employment status fluctuated based on the level of demand for care services by the clients. As service-providing institutions expanded through privatization, most care workers and child-care teachers in the private sector experienced high income instability, with the income level of the national minimum wage. The visiting care workers suffered from a significant decrease in working hours and income levels as the family members of clients who were unemployed or telecommuting increased during COVID-19. The scope of care workers' responsibilities also broadened following COVID-19; it grew to include adherence to quarantine rules, such as disinfection, cleaning, and monitoring and drafting lists of entry and exit of visitors, as well as tasks previously conducted by external specialists and volunteers. Care workers in institutions were affected by a worsened shortage of personnel as some external staff, such as volunteers, were restricted from entry because of strict social distancing measures. Furthermore, in contrast to how care workers were required to ensure the safety of the clients, the safety of the care workers was not sufficiently guaranteed. Accordingly, care workers often expressed anxiety about the infection and spread of the COVID-19.

The findings of the job resources for care workers in Korea are as follows: First, a lack of support system for care workers is evident because of the high labour intensity and the restrictions on getting rest. Safety and health measures related to the prevention of COVID-19 were particularly inadequate in care at home. Second, for the child-care teachers, quarantine measures were providing masks, placing hand sanitizers, and disinfecting spaces and equipment at the institution level, which received positive responses. However, safety and health measures for visiting care workers were not systematically prepared or implemented; for instance, even masks were not provided at some institutions. Third, unemployment insurance did not cover involuntary unemployment experienced by visiting care workers who work for two or more clients on a part-time basis. Finally, in relation to the instability of employment and income caused by COVID-19, institutional decoupling in the social security system on visiting care workers was identified. In particular, the temporary subsidies for visiting care workers required strict criteria and were not efficient in addressing the various forms of income-reduction risks that visiting care workers experienced due to COVID-19.

Identification of Relevant Areas of Intervention

Labour market policy

The analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on economic activity status by gender and occupational class in Korea shows that the pandemic harmed women's labour-market participation, presenting a high rate of movement from employment to economically inactive during the COVID-19 crisis. Women are discussed as a representative group with poor representation of unemployment indicators, alongside youth, the elderly, and the disabled (Baum and Mitchell, 2010; Hwang, 2010; Signorelli et al., 2012). Furthermore, previous studies in Korea also point out that the rate of change from employment to economically inactive status without passing through unemployment status is very high and gendered in the Korean labour market (Hwang, 2010; Jung, 2014). Therefore, when examining changes in economic activity status during the economic crisis, it is necessary to focus on potential unemployment.

As a result, the significant difference in the proportion between unemployment (0.8 per cent) and potential unemployment (3.5 per cent) underpins the limitation of the official unemployment rate discussed by previous studies. Meanwhile, the proportion of face-to-face work logic was lower than their counterparts (non-face-to-face work logic) in employment and this can be partially accounted for by the perspective which considers the new occupational hazard in COVID-19 as the lack of possible telecommuting (Avdiu and Nayyar, 2020; Pouliakas and Branka, 2020). Specifically, within the face-to-face work logic, while high-skilled workers of either gender, and males in any position, likely changed to potential unemployment, low-skilled workers of either gender and females in any position likely changed to pure economically inactive. These results imply that pure economically inactive status, which is without work and not available for and seeking work, also needs thorough examination to develop labour policy.

Finally, the proportion of non-face-to-face and high-skilled male group were the highest in employment. This group is consisted of technical experts, technicians, higher-grade managers and administrators, and associate managers and administrators. This result could be partially accounted for by the discussion of Stone (2007) that in the United States, not only

women's individual preferences have an effect on many highly educated professional women opting out of the labour force, but also: men's preference for traditional nurturing environments; the continuing gender division of labour; the burden of intensive mothering placed on the middle and upper classes to meet the developmental needs of children; conflict between the norms of ideal worker and women's life cycle; and the male-centred organisational culture. The relation of the institutional contexts of the labour market policies to the gendered results in Korea must be understood in line with the care and family policy.

Care and family policy

Highlighting the limitations of the preceding studies that examine the difference in employment and/or unemployment effect by gender, this study included changes in the economically inactive population and also examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by occupational class focusing on face-to-face jobs. The results of this study show that the pandemic harmed women's labour market participation presenting a high rate of movement from employment to unemployment or economically inactive during the COVID-19 crisis. In other words, regardless of the skill level and work logic of previous jobs, women were more unlikely to sustain employment status before and after COVID-19 than men. This can be explained by unequally allocated unpaid care and domestic work based on the gendered division of labour.

This result is largely linked to the other result that women presented a high rate of movement from employment to the pure economically inactive population during COVID-19, which raises the question of whether such transition is by women's choice. During the pandemic, an increase in care responsibilities resulted from the closure of day-care centres and schools. However, this increased care demand and domestic work during the crisis were likely concentrated on women (ILO, 2020), and the increased time spent on domestic chores due to the closure of restaurants and other services may have affected women's choice in participating in the labour market, which resulted in women moving to pure inactive labour market status. Overall gendered transition occurred during COVID-19, should be carefully examined based on the institutional contexts

of gendered labour market before COVID-19 in Korea. Also, particularly in the non-face-to-face work logic, women who have high-skilled jobs have a higher tendency to move to the inactive population than those who have low-skilled jobs during the pandemic. Women with highly skilled occupations may have higher income partners (Esping-Andersen 2009), which can push them to opt out of the labour market since there is less urgency for income earning for the household. Stone (2007) also explained the phenomenon of highly skilled married women opting out of the labour force focusing on the gendered cultural and institutional context. Therefore, a thorough examination of how women's economic activity patterns change according to the different welfare state systems and labour market structures is required to understand the cultural and institutional conditions related to the gendered labour market transitions in Korea.

Essential workers with face-to-face work logic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was relatively easy for some workers to switch to remote working or telecommuting. Yet, many workers became unemployed or economically inactive because they could not perform their regular work at home (Bick et al., 2020). Previous studies have stated that the possibility of working from home is correlated with income level, occupation, education level, and previous employment status (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Bick et al., 2020; Brynjolfsson et al., 2020; Saltiel, 2020). Women are particularly vulnerable in this respect as their employment largely involves jobs that require strong face-to-face interaction with consumers (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). However, these studies also primarily focus on the gender gap in terms of traditional employment instability indicators. Therefore, for future policy approaches after the COVID-19, it is necessary to classify occupations in the service economy focusing not only on the skill level but also on the work logic.

For both hospital cleaners and care workers in Korea, it is necessary to solve the high labour intensity and enhance the right to rest. In addition, both hospital cleaners and care workers are under the situation of high infection risk, resulting in increased anxiety, so it is necessary to expand physical and psychological resources. Finally, regarding the social protection system, the majority of care workers are engaged in the form of non-standard employment and experienced partial unemployment due to COVID-19. Therefore, reforms of the unemployment protection system on both short-term and long-term bases are needed.

Learning from the COVID-19: Future Policy Approaches for Gender Justice

Labour market and social protection system based on the gender perspective

From the examination of the status change in economic activities, the proportion of potential unemployment was higher than that of unemployment. It shows the necessity of comparing this group with the unemployed to figure out the commonalities and differences for developing future labour market policies, especially in times of economic crisis. Therefore, it is required not only to differentiate the unemployed and the potentially unemployed, but also to distinguish between the categories of available potential jobseekers, who are not seeking a job but want a job and are available, and unavailable jobseekers, who want to work but are currently not available to work (due to temporary illness or childcare), enabling a different policy approach for each status.

Also, in terms of work logic, the proportion of the face-to-face work logic was lower than their counterparts (non-face-to-face work logic). It implies that occupational classes with face-to-face work logic are generally experiencing employment insecurity, exclusion from the unemployment protection system, and/or long-term unemployment more than their counterparts. Even those who lost their jobs are classified as having the same face-to-face work logic, even if their trajectory is differentiated by gender and skill level, which may experience worsened risks than that of the high-skilled workers of either gender and males in any position. Qualitative analysis of the hospital cleaners and care workers shows that institutional reform of unemployment insurance adjusted to the work arrangements of non-standard employment would enhance the adequacy and improve the coverage for all with volatile employment records. Therefore, the eligibility criteria of unemployment insurance should be broadened and the calculation system in the payment and benefit of social insurance should be changed from an employment to an income basis.

Strengthening family and care policy

The results of quantitative analysis are that the proportion of women who entered pure economically

inactive status was far higher than that of men in every occupational class. Although it remains to be examined whether the pattern of women's economic activity associated with occupational class continues or changes in periods other than COVID-19, this shows that significant gender differences in the labour-market transition exists in COVID-19. Therefore, regardless of the skill level and work logic, both degenderisation in the care leave policy and expansion of the public care service is necessary for the Korean labour market. While specific contexts and situations resulting in the entry to pure economically inactive may differ by the occupational class within women, which also requires closer attention for future policy development, the significance of care and family policy cannot be underestimated, based on the discussions of prior studies (Stone, 2007; Esping-Anderson, 2009; Hwang, 2010).

In contrast to the situation of overall women, non-face-to-face and high-skilled men in Korea have the least proportion of the status change to pure economically inactive among all the groups. Since the overall expansion of the care leave and public care service, and the degenderisation of care and family policy is significant, the degendering policy options adjusted to this occupational class should be explored. Alongside these changes in care and family policy, the labour market system, which is currently characterised by long working hours and male-centred organisational culture, also should be reformed.

Expanding support and protection for essential workers

The policy approach for essential workers in general is the public support of physical and psychological resources related to quarantine should be expanded by both the national and local governments in Korea. In the case of the cleaning workers in Korea, the amendment of the Occupational Safety and Health Act in August 2020 enforced the installation of resting areas, minimum heating and cooling as well as ventilation, and establishment of convenience facilities; but the subordinate legislation is still being established. It is necessary to inspect the working conditions of hospital cleaning workers, through such

measures as the survey on the actual state of resting areas carried out in November 2021 by the Korean Health & Medical Workers' Union, and to establish a system to inspect the working environment based on related laws and regulation.

For the care workers in Korea, first of all, it is necessary to realize the allocation and size of personnel to solve the problem of the high labour intensity. Next, with the public support of physical and psychological resources regard to quarantine, improvement in access to psychological counselling services are necessary, as care workers often experience significant depression due to anxiety about the risk of infection and increased workload. Furthermore, in response to the worsening employment and income instability of care workers due to the prolonged COVID-19, it is necessary to ease the eligibility criteria for employment maintenance support benefits for care workers in institutions and temporary support benefits for care workers at home.

Summary and Recommendation

We analysed how the COVID-19 pandemic affected gender equality in the Korean labour market by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. First of all, we examined the effect of COVID-19 on the change in economic activity status by gender and occupational class in Korea by multinomial logistic regression analysis. As a result, it was found that men were more likely than women to remain in employment before and after COVID-19 in all occupational classes. However, the difference by gender was large in the non-face-to-face occupational class. The probability of moving from employment to unemployment was slightly higher for women in non-face-to-face low-skilled jobs than for men. Next, the probability of shifting from employment to potential unemployment was higher for men than for women in all occupational classes except for non-face-to-face highly skilled occupations, and the difference became larger as they progressed toward the face-to-face occupations. Lastly, the probability of moving from employment to pure economically inactive was higher for women than for men in all occupational classes.

Then, we identified the impact of COVID-19 on the working conditions and job quality of the essential workers focusing on hospital cleaners and care workers through in-depth interviews. With high job demands and weak job resources, the working conditions for essential workers in Korea were already poor. As working conditions would not have changed, their experience as essential workers during the pandemic is likely to have brought new demands on their work and possibly constrained the resources available to them. The poor working conditions were further aggravated by the health risks stemming from their contact with the public, especially when undertaken in an insecure working environment and the absence of protective equipment.

The key suggestions for the labour market and social protection system are as follows: First, the examination of the status change in economic activities shows the necessity of comparing this group with the unemployed to figure out the commonalities and differences for developing future labour market policies, especially in

times of economic crisis. Next, the lower proportion of the face-to-face work logic in sustaining employment status implies that occupational classes with face-to-face work logic are more likely than their counterparts to experience employment insecurity, exclusion from the unemployment protection system, and/or long-term unemployment. Therefore, institutional reform of unemployment insurance is suggested, adjusted to the work arrangements of non-standard employment to enhance the adequacy and improve the coverage.

In terms of care and family policy, the results of quantitative analysis show that the proportion of women who entered pure economically inactive status was far higher than that of men in every occupational class. It shows that significant gender difference in the labour market transition exists in COVID-19. Therefore, regardless of the skill level and work logic, both degenderisation in the care leave policy and expansion of the public care service is necessary for the Korean labour market. In contrast to the situation of overall women, non-face-to-face and high-skilled men in Korea have the least proportion of the status change to pure economically inactive among all the other groups, which requires the exploration of the degendering policy options adjusted to this occupational class. Alongside these changes in care and family policy, the labour market system, characterised by of long working hours and male-centred organisational culture, also should be reformed.

For overall essential workers in Korea, the public support of physical and psychological resources related to quarantine should be expanded by both the national and local governments. In terms of cleaning workers, it is necessary to inspect the working conditions of hospital cleaning workers, through such measures as the survey on the actual state of resting areas. For care workers, it is necessary to realise the allocation and size of personnel to solve the problem of high labour intensity. Furthermore, in response to the worsening employment and income instability of care workers due to the prolonged COVID-19, it is necessary to ease the eligibility criteria for employment maintenance support benefits and temporary support benefits.

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