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Can contactless volunteer activities be an alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to provide a viable alternative for volunteer services which became inactive due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, cases of contactless volunteer work involving children using the M Social Welfare Center located in the city of Paju in Gyeonggi-do Province were studied using reputational case selection. The aforementioned children are children whose parents have hearing disabilities (CODAs: child of deaf adults). In all of the examined cases, six sessions of online volunteer work have been carried out with these children. In-depth interviews were conducted with four participants, two non-participants, two of the twelve youth volunteers, and one social worker. The results of the study were as follows: firstly, there are several advantages to online volunteer work such as providing an alternative to the conventional volunteering method during the COVID-19 pandemic, no restrictions of location or place, recipients having their own private space, and the volunteers and recipients being able to open up to each other and being able to grow together through this process. Secondly, issues to be noted during the process are the characteristics of the recipients, the role of social workers, the education of volunteers and the attitude of the volunteers. Finally, aspects that need to be improved are the recognition of online volunteer hours and paralleling online volunteer work with other volunteer methods when the COVID-19 situation improves in the future. Through these findings, this study suggested practical and policy implications.

Keywords. contactless volunteer work, COVID-19, case study, CODA, online volunteer work

I. Introduction

Not long after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus at the end of 2019, COVID-19 was declared to be a pandemic in March of 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). This situation greatly influenced and changed our daily lives. What was once familiar and commonplace such as going outside without wearing a face mask became unfamiliar, and the age of the “new normal” started where new concepts are taken as given (Lee, 2020). People began wearing masks as they go about their daily lives in all spaces, including public areas, and flexible work arrangements were established by the recommendation of the government (Lim et al., 2020). Due to concerns about contagion through contact, educational institutions including elementary, middle, high schools, and universities have implemented remote learning online. In contrast to the decrease in sales of offline retailers, the activity of online distribution can be said to be a representative example of the advent of an ‘untact’ society (Lee, 2020).

Volunteering also faced a change. Korea Volunteer Center provided guidelines for responding to COVID-19 in volunteer sites in August 2020. It was recommended that activities requiring contact with others are avoided and that campaigns are promoted using the media and other such tools. The current situation in which conventional volunteer activities have become difficult can be seen through the current status of the number of volunteers. For example, by June 2020, the number of national volunteers in the first half of the year was 6,848,549 (1365 Volunteer Portal, 2020). Considering the fact that in the first half of 2019, just one year ago, there were 12,900,914 volunteers, it can be seen that about half of the volunteer activities were reduced.

The problem was that, while the rapid changes have occurred in the face of the pandemic, the socially vulnerable invariably need help from volunteers. Due to “social distancing” during COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of loneliness has been raised (Hwang et al., 2020; Landmann & Rohmann, 2021). Especially, the socially vulnerable such as lower income households or people living alone experience greater anxiety, depression and loneliness (McQuaid et al., 2021). This implies that they need help because the risk of vulnerable groups is conspicuously revealed in the COVID-19 situation (Lee, Lee & Bak, 2020). Since volunteering activities are mainly targeted at socially vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents, the elderly, the disabled, and multicultural households (Lee et al., 2017), the decrease in volunteer activities are likely to be a bigger problem in that the difficulties these groups are facing cannot be alleviated.

Volunteering is necessary in that it solves social problems by highlighting the blind spot of social welfare to the private sector (Lee et al., 2017). Although the definition of the concept of volunteering is inconsistent and varies widely, a few shared characteristics include the following: 1. under the organizational management and supervision of the service organization, 2. in the official field, 3. with minimal financial and/or material expectations, 4. done voluntarily, 5. aiming for the public interest (Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Song, 2016). Volunteers with these characteristics not only solve social problems centered on the target audience, but volunteering also provides volunteers with opportunities for leisure, self-realization, education and growth. In a wider view, volunteering with these characteristics establishes civic consciousness, increases social capital, and emphasizes the importance of local communities (Ju, 2016; Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Min et al., 2018).

Alternatives were provided in many previous studies to revitalize volunteering with such proper functions. “Pro Bono,” through which experts use their expertise to voluntarily help without pay, “volunteerism,” which combines tourism and volunteering during long-term vacations, and “voluntainment,” which emphasizes play and fun, representatives of this new paradigm. However, in the current situation that requires social distancing, these types of volunteering have limitations in that they do not guarantee health and safety such as minimizing the risk of infection. In particular, there are not many studies for volunteering in a situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has not exceeded a year since the pandemic first broke out.

Meanwhile, in the current situation where online contactless activities such as remote working or online classes are encouraged, the possibility of online volunteering can also be considered. Therefore, through cases of online volunteering, we would like to examine the possibility of alternative volunteer in the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with these research objectives, this study will examine the merits of online volunteering, aspects to be cautious about, and aspects that can be improved.

II. Research Method

1. Qualitative Case Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the possibility of alternative volunteer in the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19. Researchers judged that it was appropriate to conduct research with qualitative research methods. In a pandemic situation in which social distancing is emphasized, a qualitative research method that reflects the insider perspective of related stakeholders involved in a case of volunteering rather than a quantitative approach that conducts variable-centered research on multiple populations is considered appropriate. A qualitative case study is applied to intensive research on a small number of limited cases. Since the phenomenon to be investigated is linked to circumstantial conditions, it is a research method that deals with circumstantial conditions together (Yin, 2003).

This study analyzed the case of a volunteer service club consisting of twelve students from S school doing online volunteer work through the M General Social Welfare Center in Paju, Gyeonggi-do. Recipients were selected by expert recommendation through reputational case selection, the method of selecting participants who fit the research topic with the help of a group of experts with rich experience and knowledge related to a specific field (Miller and Carpenter, 2009). More specifically, three experts in M General Social Welfare Center and two professors in S University recommended children of deaf adults (CODAs). The reasons are as follows. First, their ages were similar with volunteers, making communication easier. Second, they had possibility to get used to contactless volunteer activities because they had been familiar with video phone calls due to their parents' hearing impairment. As a result, six children with parents who have hearing impairments were selected as recipients.

The details of the volunteer program are as follows. The plan was to complete volunteer service online using the video program "Zoom". The volunteer service club sent an e-mail to several companies explaining the purpose of their volunteer work and asking for sponsorship, and under the sponsorship of a company, tablet PCs were donated to six volunteer children in July 2020. After that, one recipient and two volunteers were grouped together, and, starting from the first week of August, volunteer activities were completed twice a week for a total of six sessions of volunteering.

However, due to complications with communication and using Zoom, two recipients for the first week of volunteering were unable to participate in the volunteer program and the program was conducted with the other four recipients. As a result, one recipient and three volunteers were assigned to each group and the program operated with a total of four groups. The program participants (recipients and volunteers) did not designate specific days of the week due to scheduling issues, but the program was seamlessly executed as the appointment time for the following session was set with the completion of each session. The contents of the program consisted of talking about each other's future goals, drawing pictures depicting the future they dream of, flower arranging, making pencil cases, and playing video games together.

2. Survey Method and Data Analysis

For data analysis purposes, survey subjects were selected from social workers involved in the program, recipients (CODA), and youth volunteers (members of a volunteer service club). In-depth interviews were conducted with one social worker, two recipients who left the program midway, four recipients who participated in the program for the entire duration, and two volunteers. Before the interviews were conducted, verbal consent to participate was received through phone calls and written agreements to participate were collected either in person or online after explaining the intent and purpose of the study. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions.

1<Table > Study Participants' Background Information

Study Participant	Gender	Status	Additional Information	
A	M	Social Worker		
B	F	Volunteer	S School Volunteer Club Member	
C	M	Volunteer	S School Volunteer Club Member	
D	M	Recipient	Elementary School 4 th grade	Participated in program
E	F	Recipient	Elementary School 6 th grade	
F	F	Recipient	Elementary School 2 nd grade	
G	M	Recipient	Middle School 3 rd grade	
H	F	Recipient	Elementary School 3 rd grade	Left the program midway
I	M	Recipient	Elementary School 5 th grade	

Data was collected using a recorder with the consent of the subjects at the start of each interview. The data analysis of this study used the question-and-answer method and the constant comparison method suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1990). The continuous comparison method is a coding method of qualitative data based on grounded theory, and when a new category or topic is discovered in the coding process, it goes back to the beginning of the data and continuously checks and reviews whether the coding work done so far has been coded according to the new category or topic (Padgett, 1998). Based on this method, the tentative concepts that came to mind while perusing the printed materials line by line from start to finish were recorded. During one perusal of the entire data, concepts named in the beginning were continuously compared with concepts that came out later and were revised or integrated. In addition, new ideas emerged and were added to the previous concepts. After reading through the concepts as a whole, the concepts were modified and reduced to create the subject category while rereading the concepts anew. This process was done more than three times in total, and as a result, the consistency of the found subjects was improved.

3. Consideration of Ethical Issues and Securing Rigor

Ethical issues to be considered in qualitative research include explanation of the research, informed consent, voluntary participation, damage and compensation from participation in the research, and confidentiality (Kwon et al., 2010). Researchers informed the research participants that they will be involved in the research from the beginning of data collection, provided specific information about the research, and asked for consent to participate in the research. In the process of seeking consent to participate in the research, voluntary participation, damage and compensation from participation in the research, and issues of

confidentiality were explained, and all those who gave their consent voluntarily expressed their intention to participate. To ensure confidentiality, all participants are anonymous in this study.

Rigor is related to how reliable the results of the study are (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998). In this study, the following standards were established and followed to ensure the rigor of the study. The first standard is prolonged engagement. Researchers had continuous meetings with the research participants through volunteer programs, and through these meetings, they tried to thoroughly explain the purpose of the study. The second standard is member checking. Confirmation of research participants prevents the researcher from falling into bias. To this end, the researchers showed the analysis results to individual research participants and sought advice.

III. Analysis Results

The characteristics recognized through the program by the research participants who planned or participated in online volunteer activities were as follows.

1. Advantages of Online Volunteer Work

1) Alternative Method of Volunteer Work during COVID-19 Pandemic

The spread of the Corona 19 virus has made it difficult for those in need of welfare to receive help. It is a harsh reality that access to welfare centers is difficult except for some target groups.

“Contactless is not even in the standard operating procedure for volunteering. You have to come in person, sign your name, and proceed with the program. Adults can't volunteer at all. The welfare center was closed and you couldn't come and go to the welfare center, so it was completely shut down (omission). Those who provide emergency care at the Welfare Center for the disabled will return. These lifestyle managers are sure to visit the elderly who are highly prioritized. Despite the pandemic, it is mandatory. But for such special cases, however, it is forbidden by law to visit the site.”

(Study Participant A)

The problem is that it has become difficult to even visit and provide services directly, even when some of the vulnerable groups who have found it difficult to access welfare centers are excluded. The existing way of volunteering where volunteers would go to the welfare center, sign, and volunteer has become impossible. This can also be seen from the significant decrease in the number of volunteers compared to 2019, as mentioned above (1365 Volunteer Portal, 2020).

“First of all, there is the coronavirus, and in some ways, it is a time when volunteering can't be done autonomously. But with tools like Zoom allowing for something remote, I think I was better able to overcome the limitations. Something else... Originally, if I was thinking about one method of volunteering, I think it would be an opportunity to think in a different direction due to the coronavirus.”

(Study Participant C)

Therefore, due to the pandemic, online volunteering (which can be done without any contact between the volunteer and the recipient) could be a new attempt instead of face-to-face volunteering. In fact, the Korea Volunteer Center is recommending campaigns using media and

other such platforms. However, in the case of the campaign, it is difficult to proceed without prior understanding and sympathy for the target audience, and direct exchange is insufficient.

“The direct reason for taking part in the remote class is that I can't meet them in person anymore, but if I can see the children's faces, I think it will be more meaningful. At the very least, looking at their faces like that was my biggest motivation (to volunteer).”

(Study Participant B)

“Well... While participating in Eighteen (volunteer service club), I always did something like a bazaar rather than directly helping... (This online volunteering) thought I liked the time to be able to work directly. I think this opportunity allows them to see what they really need.”

(Study Participant C)

The students who participated in the online volunteer activity were members of the volunteer club, mainly doing activities such as fundraising and campaigns through bazaars. There was an opportunity for them to deliver the fund raised and to meet the volunteers, but the volunteers were disappointed that it was difficult to accurately grasp the needs of the recipients. However, unlike campaign activities, remote volunteering through video calls has the advantage of being able to communicate directly with volunteers.

2) No Limits of Location

Another advantage of online volunteering is that it is not restricted by location. In fact, the volunteers lived in Seoul, and the recipients lived in Paju, Gyeonggi-do. Before starting the full-scale volunteer activities, some volunteers visited the M General Social Welfare Center in Paju-si to deliver tablet PCs to the recipients. Considering the fact that it took more than an hour and a half to reach the welfare center, it would have been more difficult for the six-session program to be carried out in-person. In particular, in light of the fact that both volunteers and recipients are children and adolescents, such merit is found more effective.

“They (the volunteers and recipients) did have to arrange their schedules and set aside time, but since they didn't have to visit a certain location or place to meet, they were able to meet efficiently without worrying too much about time.”

(Study Participant B)

“We made appointments through KakaoTalk. So just joining the meeting (through the Zoom call) wasn't difficult.”

(Study Participant F)

If the physical distance between the volunteer and the target person is far and the volunteer program has to be conducted in person, there is the inconvenience of parents or other guardians having to help the volunteers find a means of transportation to get to the volunteer site. However, if it is difficult for children and adolescents who are familiar with mobile devices to use the video program (Zoom), it is possible to easily and flexibly conduct the program by using other means of contact, such as Kakao Talk.

“The recipient must be within this area... and they have to fulfill the requirements to be classified as an applicable recipient. In contrast, we now do a lot (of volunteer work) with

Jeju Island now. Jeju Island high school students and our high school students... A program that connects with vulnerable children. Although we can't keep crossing districts and doing that with all programs that keep children connected, I have run programs like that once every year. Now, if the budget and the conditions of the recipient are met, I have to go outside the district and connect with children in Seoul, so that the children can expand their horizons and have a wider view."

(Study Participant A)

Volunteering is characterized by emphasizing the importance of local communities (Lee et al., 2017), such as reforming the community based on recovery of village function (Kim, 2015). However, this community-based characteristic does not necessarily mean that the volunteers and recipients are in the same local community. It is also desirable for an organization that arranges or prepares volunteer activities to discover recipients in the local area and provide opportunities to have a broader perspective to help growth. Online volunteer programs have advantages that fit this purpose.

3) The Recipients' Secret Forest

"Study Participant E has already entered puberty. She is a student in a higher grade in elementary school. The child is practically an interpreter at home. Since their parents are deaf, they have to translate with their grandmother, and they have to report each situation one by one, so they're very familiar with the situation of their household. Also, they have to talk to someone like me (a social worker). So, knowing the situation of the family, the child volunteer program is now an escape for them. They met an older student who is like a sister once, and they feel so happy. But since they lack confidence, their face wasn't exposed during the meeting, they're unhappy and they can't express these things well because they're growing up now. They talk to people they are close to, but not to people they don't know that well and aren't very close to knock at the doors of their hearts. Nevertheless, this means that through this program, the children have formed a strong connection."

(Study Participant A)

This volunteer program is aimed at non-disabled children whose parents are hearing impaired. One of their characteristics is that they know the situation of adults in the family well even at a young age. Since they are in a position where they help with necessary communication between parents and adults outside the home, they become aware of problems such as financial difficulties in the family during the interpreting process. In such an environment, they may be reluctant to meet new people. Although Study Participant E in the above statement conducted the program in a way that the camera was covered and their face was not exposed, there was a possibility that if it was an in-person program, they would be reluctant to participate.

"It was fun, but because it felt awkward and unfamiliar(I covered the camera)."

(Study Participant E)

Although the above statement is very short, one can see that study participant E wanted to participate in the program, even though they did not want to reveal their identity. Online volunteering using video calls is suitable for recipients who feel the same way as study participant E. This is because recipients who want to participate in the program but do not want to expose their identity can proceed with the program by turning off the camera or letting it show a different spot or frame.

“He (study participant G) loves it (the online volunteer program) in a positive way. One may wonder how there can be no other social network like this, but there aren't many. Even children in ordinary families don't easily meet anyone. Connections need to be made in order to meet, but we overlook these connections because the family is so stable, but the children are uneasy at home, and there is a sense of anxiety because their father is on kidney dialysis. Through a volunteer program such as the one mentioned above, one can have their own sort of secret forest, like a garden an emotional escape.”

(Study Participant A)

There are instances where recipients in poor home environments have difficulty forming social networks. Although there is a physical distance in meeting these recipients online, having continuous meetings in itself can have the effect of creating a new sanctuary in their mind.

“The times we spent together and the relationships we shared. I think they helped.”

(Study Participant G)

4) Opening Each Other's Minds and Growing Together

The subject's “secret forest” is formed because there is a space to open the mind. In that “secret forest,” it can be a new space where not only the recipients grow, but volunteers can also grow together with the recipients.

“Rather, it was very difficult for me to make emotional connections and contact with our CODA children face-to-face. To open their minds and hearts. The program that I do where we meet in-person takes a lot of time omission. I think that online volunteering has a more positive effect in this regard.”

(Study Participant A)

“I don't know if this is a benefit of online classes, but the conversations weren't as awkward as I'd expected them to be. At first, I thought it would be very awkward (omission). What I enjoyed was the conversations where they shared their daily lives and experiences, such as what they did at school today. I think it was great because it was just like talking to a friend.”

(Study Participant B)

Running a program online without actually meeting the recipient beforehand can be an opportunity to open each other's minds rather than creating awkwardness. This opening of each other's minds is also an important, substantial part of the program. The substance of the program is not a one-sided teaching method. The program creates a feeling of unity and being together, providing opportunities for growth to both the recipient and the volunteer.

“First of all, we weren't teaching them (the recipients). We agreed not to use this type of format because we thought that they might be a little uncomfortable. But, uh... It wasn't a teaching format, it wasn't doing things that only they (the recipients) liked it was doing fun activities together, just drawing and stuff like that and this seemed a little more effective. When creating a sort of bond and relationship.”

(Study Participant C)

Above all, it is important to ensure that the volunteers and the recipients share areas of common interest and that they do them together. When the recipient shows active participation and interest, the volunteers can also participate in volunteer work more seamlessly.

“At first, I did feel that they didn't want to do it very much, but was forcing themselves to do it. While doing things like drawing and playing cart riders (online video games). For example, when we were drawing, they only drew half after class, but after class, they just drew the rest at home. So, after seeing that, I thought that they really are interested in this. I had these types of thoughts and they had a high grade even as they played Cart-rider and in that sense, they participated more actively than before.”

(Study Participant C)

In fact, study participants D, E, F, and G selected activities that the volunteers and recipients did together (such as drawing pictures and making pencil cases) as the most memorable experiences during the program. Through these activities, recipients were able to create a refuge such as the aforementioned “secret forest.” The recipients are not the only ones provided with the opportunity for growth. The volunteers that participated in the program with the recipients are also given the opportunity to grow.

“A way to get closer to the kids? I think I learned to ask questions in a way that was less burdensome and I learned other methods.”

(Study Participant B)

“First off, for us, I think the experience was an opportunity for us to learn more. Abstractly, we just thought, ‘they will want something like this.’ I think the experience allowed us to think and see from their perspectives. And from their point of view, they would have said that they were doing the program because they wanted to do it, so I think we became older sisters and brothers that they can contact even after the program and that they can grow together with.”

(Study Participant C)

2. Points to Note and to be Aware of During the Program

1) Characteristics of the recipients

Study participants H and I, who decided to participate in the program together but were unable to do so due to difficulty in attending the program, were children, and they used mobile phones with restricted functions. Since contact with people outside of their families was limited, although prior contact was made in order to schedule an appointment to proceed with the program, difficulties arose as they were not notified of this. Also, even though they did participate after numerous struggles and issues, they gave up halfway because they didn't know how to use Zoom (the online video program).

“(On my phone) unknown callers are blocked.”

(Study Participant H)

“It’s not the time that mattered - difficulties arose when I tried to keep calling...I tried

using Zoom before, but I couldn't hear the audio. Oh, and the KakaoTalk notification doesn't appear on my phone at all.”

(Study Participant I)

Although it was difficult for them to attend, they were reluctant to ask for help from adults around them such as parents and social workers. In this case, it was analyzed that it was due to psychological characteristics caused by their environments. Therefore, in planning online volunteering, it is important to understand the characteristics of the recipients well and to prepare solutions for expected issues and situations.

“It is clear that they (study participants H, I) are dejected and disheartened. This is a slightly different problem, especially when parents have disabilities and cannot hear or speak. The children want to hide.”

(Study Participant A)

However, the characteristics of the recipients do not only create difficulties for the online volunteer program. The fact that they are familiar with video calls (rather than calls made through regular cell phones) In order to contact parents and such, as well as the fact that Zoom is not unfamiliar to them since they are currently taking school classes online through videos acted as factors that helped them adapt well to the program.

“The kids who are very familiar with this are CODA. Because all of them are children who need to make video calls. Also, video phones are widely distributed among households. So, they are much more used to this because people with hearing impairments can use sign language over the phone this way.”

(Study Participant A)

“Since we take classes online for school, it wasn't that difficult.”

(Study Participant D)

2) The Role of Social Workers

The role of social workers in conducting volunteer programs is particularly important in the preparation phase. It is necessary to select the type of volunteer program and appropriate recipients that fit the program, and to plan program content that will be suitable for the recipients. In the case of research participant A, he or she listened to what type of program the volunteers wanted, selected suitable recipients, and were able to match the recipients with volunteers based on the social worker's experiences in the social welfare field.

“I was, and still am, in charge of the division for people with hearing impairments at the church. That's why I keep listening to the complaints of their mothers and their parents. You listen to their complaints, and now that you hear what these children are worried about, you know what these children need. We also have two adopted children who have hearing impairments. While raising these children, I naturally see what the problem is. I can see these things now.”

(Study Participant A)

However, in the case of online volunteering, autonomy must be guaranteed for volunteers and recipients in order to create a “secret forest” in which they can open their minds

to each other and grow together. If an adult volunteer participates in this “secret forest”- like programs using Zoom, where most participants are of a similar age, it will no longer be a “secret forest” for the recipient. During the actual program, the recipients closed their room doors and asked their parents not to enter. It is important that social workers are careful to let recipients keep their own personal space. More motivating and creative activities of volunteers take place when constraints placed by supervisors or managers are minimized (Lee et al., 2017), and thus it is desirable to ensure the autonomy of volunteers and subjects as much as possible in online volunteering.

“The people who actually participate in this project are not social workers, but our students. Pure friends. That's why I think this is very good. These friends communicate with the children of CODA. I also thought, ‘If a social worker ran the program, could it be as natural as this?’”

(Study Participant A)

After one session of the program is over, you can simply check whether there were any issues because the Zoom program has a recording function that allows one to check the contents of their activities on the screen.

3) Educating Volunteers and the Mindset of a Volunteer

Another factor that allowed for satisfactory results for social workers, volunteers and recipients was the attitude of volunteers. The volunteers in this study are students who have prior volunteer experiences and have been volunteering through volunteer clubs. They understand the foundational mindset of a volunteer and know what points to be aware of.

“We don't accept middle school students as volunteers. They don't really listen well. I reject them because they're difficult to work with, but the children (the volunteers) I met on the first day were very innocent. I thought ‘These kids are so innocent. I hope that the kids (recipients) do well.’ Anyway, they were so kind to the extent that I could not believe it. They are not like the high school kids I've seen. Although not all of them are like this, most kids have bottled up the tension. That's why it was fortunate that we met.”

(Study Participant A)

However, volunteer training should be carried out in advance to educate the basic attitudes for volunteers. Orientation and training help volunteers understand the role of volunteers and the purpose of the program (Lee et al., 2017). In particular, as online volunteering is a relatively new method compared to the in-person method, it should be accompanied by corresponding education.

“I think a very well-organized and well-planned education or orientation can be of great assistance for the children. In a way that does not infringe too much. However, if the high school friends who are volunteering are well-aware of volunteer work, we can just give them a general overview such as 'If the children ask for money, you shouldn't give it.' Just general tips and advice like that.”

(Study Participant A)

In the aforementioned case where volunteers dealt with subjects who did not expose their faces, there were instances of misunderstanding where the volunteers questioned whether

the recipients were forced to participate. Volunteers asked supervisors for advice regarding these sensitive situations and supervisors provided counseling to explain the environmental and psychological characteristics of CODA.

“I asked them to show their face a few times during the call. They would do it at first, but it seemed like they didn’t want to show their face later on. I just asked them to turn the camera towards the side (so that their face wouldn’t show) and asked them to show their drawings and such.”

(Study Participant C)

3. Points to Improve

1) Acknowledgment of Volunteer Hours

Volunteers in this case did not care much about whether the volunteer hours were counted and acknowledged, so they were able to participate voluntarily. But for middle and high school students who need acknowledgement for their volunteer hours, the fact that online volunteering hours are not acknowledged becomes an obstacle.

“Because the COVID-19 situation wasn’t as severe before the Sarangjeil Church August 15th Liberation Day rally, students came to the welfare center and started a volunteer program. Then, as the number of confirmed cases suddenly increased, everything changed to contactless and the children met through Zoom again. The problem is that if you teach or do activities with Zoom, those hours spent online are not counted. They don’t acknowledge it.”

(Study Participant A)

In this case, the organizational management and supervision of the volunteer organization were carried out. In addition, since it was an activity that was voluntarily pursued in public interest without pay, it could be said that it had all the characteristics of volunteering (Kim, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Song, 2016). However, the volunteer center does not yet have a system to recognize contactless volunteer hours. In the case of online volunteering, it is possible to submit evidence such as photos and videos, so an improvement plan needs to be established to confirm and recognize volunteer hours.

2) Carrying Out Online Volunteering in Conjunction with In-Person Volunteering

The biggest effect of the volunteer activities in this case is that the recipients and the volunteers achieved an emotional connection that can be described as the “secret forest”. However, online volunteer activities targeting vulnerable groups in need of physical assistance cannot provide direct assistance.

“You can do this kind of contactless online class just like we did with our CODA friends through video. It completely changes the type and form of volunteering. Before this, I couldn't help anyone with videos. If there’s a leak in a house, the leak can’t be fixed through the video call, but it can be used to notify others of the problem. Then people in protective suits who are providing emergency care can go and solve the issue. Now, if volunteers and youths keep advocating and publicizing vulnerable social groups by linking the advocacy that is often talked about in social welfare to videos, individuals who are experts in the field can carry out their jobs and roles.”

(Study Participant A)

The above statement illustrates the role of online advocacy as alternative volunteer. While contactless volunteers cannot provide direct physical assistance, they can help solve social problems by guiding people in the authority positions or other appropriate positions to provide material assistance.

“Because there’s a limit to what we can do with this. Also, we can’t go there in person to see what the recipients are doing, and since we have to keep confirming with the recipients and see beyond the computer screen, that part was a little inconvenient.”

(Study Participant B)

“There is a bit of limitation when it comes to direct communication. After all, it is remote learning. Also, we’re doing activities together, not having heart-to-heart sessions. Also, regardless of how much I want to better form a deeper bond and open my mind with them (the recipients), that’s not something that can be done easily. So, I think I was a little disappointed in that aspect.”

(Study Participant C)

In this study, two shortcomings of remote volunteering can be found. First, when the activity is somewhat difficult for the recipient, it is more difficult to provide aid through screen during a video call compared to providing aid during in-person activities. Second, in the case of Study Participant C, because the recipient’s camera was turned off, it was difficult to talk about deeper subjects. In this regard, the volunteer felt that there was a lack of emotional connection. When the pandemic situation improves, these weaknesses can be overcome through in-person activities. Or, if the connection between the volunteer and the recipient is strengthened by continuous online volunteer activities, the lack of emotional connection can be solved in this manner as well.

“[The volunteer program] was fun. But I think it would be nice to play soccer next time.”

(Study Participant D)

The recipients in this case are elementary and middle school students who have strong desires for physical activities. In situations where in-person volunteering is made difficult, continuing the volunteer program through computer in an enclosed space such as their home can be boring for them. One solution can be to use the preexisting in-person volunteer method in conjunction with the online volunteer method, under permitting circumstances.

IV. Conclusion and Discussion

This study has analyzed the cases of contactless volunteering practice via the online video platform in order to prove it as a vital alternative of in-person volunteer activities that have been interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study imply that using online video platforms will keep the volunteering activities from being discontinued under potential situations similar to the pandemic in the future and will demonstrate its effectiveness as much as face-to-face meetings by achieving the core value of volunteering.

The analysis results are as follows. First of all, the advantages of online volunteering are: first, online volunteering is advantageous in that it can be an alternative volunteer method in the COVID-19 situation. Second, as long as the recipient and the volunteer keep their agreed schedule and appointment times, the program can proceed without any restrictions and limits

of location or physical distance. Third, the online volunteer space becomes a “secret forest” that serves as a kind of escape from the recipients’ difficulties. Fourth, online volunteer activities help volunteers and recipients open up easily and provide opportunities for them to grow together.

Issues one must be aware of when conducting online volunteering are as follows: first, the characteristics of the recipient must be considered. The recipient’s psychological state may result in them showing reactions that volunteers are not familiar with, such as not revealing their face online. However, if the recipient is familiar with mobile devices or online communities, online volunteering can become easier and more convenient. Second, the role of social workers is important. Social workers well understand the substance of volunteer work; while their role in the early stage of volunteering is important, such as selecting appropriate recipients, during the full-scale program, the volunteer and recipient’s autonomy should be respected so that they may form an emotional bond with each other. Third, appropriate education as well as appropriate mindsets of volunteers are required for online volunteering.

Finally, there are two main aspects to improve. First, in order to revitalize youth volunteering, online volunteering hours must be recognized. There are policy implications here. Most youth who volunteer are recognized for their time and want to make references for their college entrance. The problem is that in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteering in the traditional in-person manner is impossible. However, in the case of online volunteering, since the volunteer hours are not recognized, it is difficult to motivate the youth to volunteer. Since online volunteering can provide evidence such as photos or videos that prove one's participation in volunteer work, it is necessary to acknowledge the volunteer’s time using this evidence.

The second point to be improved is that when the COVID-19 situation is alleviated, it is necessary to merge the online volunteering method with other volunteer methods. When the program is conducted only on the screen, there are situations that are difficult to solve alone, especially when the recipient is young. In these instances, the volunteer has no choice but to give help by just explaining on the screen. Limitations were also found in establishing deeper emotional bonds. Therefore, when circumstances permit, it is necessary to parallelize the existing volunteering method. In this regard, as a practical implication, it is recommended that volunteer organizations prepare to use the online volunteering method in conjunction with the existing in-person volunteer method when the in-person volunteer method becomes feasible again. This parallel can lead to more seamless execution and can encourage the participation of many volunteers.

Despite the above research results and the implications based on these results, this study has several limitations. First, this study listened to the voices of various research participants, but it does not want to carelessly generalize and apply this one case of online volunteer activity to all possible cases. In particular, since the recipients of this case are in a special welfare niche called CODA, the characteristics of the recipients should be considered when conducting online volunteering for recipients in different situations. Second, academic efforts such as popularization and verification of the objective effects of volunteering will be required. Follow-up studies such as online volunteer studies for various recipients and quantitative studies that measure specific effects such as social network formation and self-esteem of recipients are needed. Finally, the program was relatively short, conducted in 6 sessions in consideration of the situation such as school break periods of volunteers and recipients. It is necessary to prepare continuous and long-term online volunteer activities to examine the long-term effects.

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