

Thematic Session  
Disability

The Risks and Alternatives  
of Institutionalization-oriented Policy  
as seen in COVID-19 Cluster Infection Cases  
at Institutions

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Two years have passed since COVID-19 began spreading widely in Korea. The pandemic has clearly exposed the weakest links of our society and it has caused a series of social tragedies. The most serious out of such events were COVID-19 infections among the disabled. In particular, institutionalized people with disabilities placed under a group-based care system were extremely vulnerable to COVID-19.

More than 100 disabled patients were infected at Daenam Hospital in Cheongdo where Korea's first COVID-19 death was reported. The problem didn't stop there. Following the infections that happened at Daenam Hospital in February 2020, a series of cluster infections occurred in the same month at institutions located in Gyeongsangbuk-do Province such as Kukrak Maeul in Yecheon and Milalgongdongche in Chilgok. In March, more infections took place at other institutions, including the Seongbo Rehabilitation Center and Second Miju Hospital in Daegu.

With respect to the trend of COVID-19 cluster infections, the disabled community points out the issue lies in the fact that disability institutions with inherent vulnerabilities stick to institutionalization-oriented policy. Against this backdrop, I'd like to use this session to talk about the risks and alternatives of institutionalization-oriented policy as seen in COVID-19 cluster infection cases at different institutions.

Focusing on the first reported emergency deinstitutionalization in Seoul that took place at the Shina Rehabilitation Center in December 2020, I will explore how to manage emergency deinstitutionalization and what preparations Korean society should make for the future course of action to ensure quick implementation in this post-COVID era when we cannot expect the pandemic to end anytime soon.

In line with the slogan "Breaking out of Isolation into an Inclusive Space" and the theme of WHRCF's Disability Session that deals with the human rights of the disabled in the pandemic context, my presentation aims to help promote the human rights of persons with disabilities through coexistence and solidarity and raise the collective awareness about the need for alliance through deinstitutionalization policy that is strongly advocated by organizations such as the UN CRPD.