

**Thematic Session
Disability**

**Working environment for people with disabilities
at vocational rehabilitation facilities**

**YEOM Jiae
[Policy Planning Team Leader,
Gwangju Metropolitan City Support Center for the Disabled]**

As previously mentioned in “The reality of poverty and income inequality for people with disabilities,” the high poverty rate of people with disabilities in their 30s and 40s when they should be actively working in the labor market, the poverty gap that persists beyond their 50s, and the low share of earned income among disabled households suggests the poverty of people with disabilities who want to work but have no place to work, and the poverty of those who do not get better even though they work. Most vocational rehabilitation facilities for the disabled apply for exemption from minimum wage and receive approval. As a result, vocational rehabilitation facilities are often criticized for low wages and poor working conditions. In this article, I would like to tell the story of 29 vocational rehabilitation facilities in Gwangju Metropolitan City¹.

○ Mainly for severely disabled/intellectually disabled people, high rate of National Basic Livelihood Security

As of 2022, there are 893 people with disabilities working for vocational rehabilitation facilities in Gwangju (689 disabled people are working there, 204 disabled people are being trained there). The rate of severely disabled (98.4%) and intellectually disabled (84.2%) is high, and most disabled people in their youth (64.3% in their 20s and 30s) receive an average monthly wage of about KRW 690,000. The number of recipients of the National Basic Livelihood Security is 34.9%, which is higher than the overall benefit recipient rate in Gwangju of 6.6% and the benefit recipient rate of the disabled of 25.6%. In the case of recipients, they found it difficult to face a decrease in their benefit due to their monthly salary, and although it would be nice to receive a higher salary, they expressed concerns about being excluded from receiving benefits.

¹ Based on the facility status analysis and in-depth interviews of the “Gwangju Metropolitan City Vocational Rehabilitation Facility Status Analysis” currently in progress by the Gwangju Disabled Support Center.

○ Facilities that focus only on profits, exclusion from minimum wage and reduced working hours

The minimum wage exclusion rate at vocational rehabilitation facilities in Gwangju is 31.5%, with the average hourly wage of disabled workers being KRW 7,968 and the average monthly working hours being 84.8 hours. Vocational rehabilitation facilities sometimes pay wages below the minimum wage level or shorten hours instead of paying the minimum wage. It was said that some facilities are reducing the existing disability benefits or accepting trainees instead of working disabled people who are supposed to be paid for their work. Disabled people whose working ability is evaluated as relatively low become trainees, and training allowances are paid at the facility's discretion without any specific criteria. The average training allowance is KRW 121,000, which is likely to be in the tens of thousands of KRW, excluding transportation and food expenses.

Vocational rehabilitation facilities are said to have low profits due to low-cost toll manufacturing and labor-intensive production methods, and are operated in a haphazard manner due to a lack of professional production and sales personnel. Because they focus only on profit, there is no systematic training environment, and because there are no people to work, they are passive in the transition of disabled people with working ability. Profit determines wages and working hours for disabled people, as well as their conversion and transition. We must seek to secure their wages and transition them to general employment by improving profits and strengthening systematic training. There is a need to link corporate cooperation, match products and sales channels, prepare systematic training manuals, and provide training allowances and wage preservation for the disabled.

Disabled people in their 20s and 30s said they wanted to become independent, go with someone, get married, and work at other than vocational rehabilitation facilities, and they hoped to find their dream as workers.

Although there may be differences in ability from the perspective of non-disabled people, disabled people are no different from non-disabled people when it comes to finding hopes and dreams. Rather than having to endure poor working conditions and wages because of a disability, I hope that people with disabilities will be able to participate in society through work and improve their standard of living with the income, allowing each person to pursue their dreams.