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Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Vietnamese migrants in South Korea

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Abstract

COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan, China, then spread vigorously around the world, seriously affecting the economy, society, and all aspects of life, and threatening the lives of humanity. Foreign migrants, who are vulnerable due to different residence statuses and living far from their families and home countries, face problems such as lack of income, comfort, basic food, stress and anxiety, and lack of psychological support. This study explores the impacts of COVID-19 on 15 Vietnamese migrants living in Korea via in-depth interviews. The results show that many migrants on short-term visas, international students, and married migrants fell into psychological crisis due to stress during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of unemployment, and unstable incomes. In particular, Vietnamese business people find themselves in challenging business situations, including bankruptcy. However, the migrants working in high education jobs, such as researchers and lecturers, have stable jobs and are less vulnerable to the economic and psychological impact. This study suggests long-term measures and strategies by the Korean Government to support foreign immigrants under COVID-19 and minimize the negative impacts of the pandemic.

■ **Keywords** : COVID 19 pandemic, Impact, Vietnamese migrant, Korea, Policy

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Introduction

Korea was the first country affected by COVID-19 once the pandemic spread outside China, with the first case detected on January 3, 2020. Moreover, a report of the World Health Organization (WHO) on October 20, 2021, stated that there were 346,088 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Korea, with 2,698 deaths, and that 68,888,152 vaccine doses had been administered (World Health Organization, 2021). To minimize the spread and risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Korean Government has applied a series of policies such as reducing migration, limiting or slowing the visa process for foreign immigration, travel restrictions, implementing four levels of social distancing to limit the number of people in gatherings and having other services close early at specified times.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants were more vulnerable than other groups because of individual, circumstantial, economic, social, and structural factors. Therefore, this study's primary research subjects are Vietnamese migrants living in Korea under various classes of visas during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focuses on understanding and exploring the difficulties and changes in the economic and spiritual life of Vietnamese migrants in Korea during the current pandemic. Accounting for the second-largest number of international migrants in Korea, they have been seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. According to the Korean Immigrant Bureau, in 2020, 2,036,075 foreign migrants were living in Korea. Vietnamese migrants to Korea increased rapidly from 120,245 in 2012 to 211,243 in 2020 (10% of total foreign immigrants). With this number, Vietnamese make up the second-largest group of migrants to Korea, following Chinese migrants (1,016,607 people). Moreover, there are three social groups in Korea in which Vietnamese migrants make up the largest proportion: There are 57,495 Vietnamese students, accounting for 37.8% of the total number of international students in Korea; 44,058 Vietnamese married migrants, accounting for 23.7% of the total number of foreign migrants

married in Korea,;and about 48,000 Vietnamese worker migrants (Korean Immigration Service, 2020).

Understanding these difficulties of Vietnamese migrants can clarify and help us identify the difficulties and challenges of foreign migrants in Korea, thereby allowing the Korean Government to develop effective strategies to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on migrants. The study advances policy interventions and recommendations as strategies to overcome and minimize difficulties for foreign migrants in Korea today.

The Impacts of COVID-19 on International Migrants

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Guadagno (2020) argued that it might be difficult for migrants to avoid infection with COVID-19 due to a range of factors, such as the difficulty in accessing adequate health care, coping with the economic, social, and psychological impacts of the pandemic on their living and working conditions, and the lack of consideration for their language. Furthermore, lack of cultural diversity in service delivery, xenophobia, limited understanding of local health networks, and access to appropriate health care can aggravate these critical factors (Guadagno, 2020).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges for migrants who relocate and settle in their host countries, even though conditions for migrants living outside are not as poor (Meer, Hill, Peace, & Villegas., 2021). Migrants are more likely to lack access to health care, which is particularly relevant during global public health crises—which holds enormous implications for society. In many countries, access to health care and treatment for COVID-19 is extremely difficult for immigrants, and they seem to receive no support from the host government (Guadagno, 2020).

In contrast, some governments have facilitated access to public health services for all immigrants regardless of their status. However, these policies appear to be the exception rather than the rule, and in most cases migrants' access to health care is limited even during a health

pandemic (Let, 2020), especially to specialized health care services. Thus, the rights of migrants are threatened (Guadagno, 2020; O'Brien & Eger, 2021).

Evidence shows that restrictions on mobility threaten to lead to violations of individual rights and sometimes to discrimination, with migrants becoming scapegoats. O'Brien and Eger (2021) point out that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was violence against people perceived as "carriers" in various parts of the world: against Americans of Asian descent in the United States and African migrants in parts of China. As cross-border mobility options are limited, incoming migrants and travelers are sent back or quarantined at the border, forcing them to stay in overcrowded, informal transit sites. Furthermore, their health, dignity, and survival are at stake (Guadagno, 2020).

Previous studies have also shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected migration-related policies. In their research, Martin and Bergmann (2021) show that when countries impose travel restrictions, they ignore and even violate basic agreements and recommendations on human rights and public health concerning movement during a pandemic. O'Brien and Eger (2020) have predicted that the cycle of repression, proliferation, and discrimination will spur political advocacy in favor of future immigration restrictions.

Therefore, as Guadagno (2020) states, crisis response strategies cannot effectively bring in migrants unless the government addresses the underlying weaknesses in migration status and immigration policy, the socioeconomic status of migrants, and xenophobia.

Research Methods

This paper used a quantitative research method with open questions to conduct in-depth interviews with migrants from Vietnam under different visa statuses and jobs from September 2 to October 20, 2021. A total of 15 people participated in in-depth interviews in various regions and cities across Korea, including Gwangju-Jeonnam Province, Incheon,

Seoul, Incheon, Gyeonggi, Busan, and Cheollabuk-do (Table 1). They are typical of various occupations and residency statuses, affording give us a better overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Vietnamese migrant community in particular and foreign migrants in Korea in general.

The 15 participants include 8 men and 7 women aged 23 to 50. Among them, there are four students with D-2 visas (graduate students and undergraduate students) and D-4 visas (overseas students studying Korean), and two assistant professors holding E-1 visas (professor visa) and F-2 visas (long-term resident visa). One person works as a postdoc fellow holding an E-3 visa (researcher). There are four married migrant women, including people holding Korean nationality and F-6 visas; one has a D-8 visa (business); and one holds an F-1 visa (visiting and joining family). They are our friends, students, and referrals from typical introductory interviewees whom we know. Therefore, the in-depth interviews were combined with the process of observing and sharing experiences in preventing and overcoming negative impacts of the pandemic.

During the interview process, we were unable to meet the interviewees in person due to the impact of COVID-19 and social distancing regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, we conducted in-depth interviews through social networks such as Zoom meetings, Facebook calls, and Kakao. Depending on the interviewees' schedules, we mainly conducted calls via Zoom. Moreover, when it was necessary to supplement the information for the research content, we also used phone calls and Kakao or texted via Facebook messages.

The questions focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work, income, education, health, daily life, and mobility issues. In order to encourage the interviewees to share their experiences under COVID-19 freely, we prepared the questions in Vietnamese and conducted the interviews in Vietnamese at several different times. In addition, we have kept in touch with them via phone and social networks such as Facebook and Kakao Talk (a popular messaging app in Korea), which has allowed us to follow up with additional questions and gain insight

Table 1

Characteristics of Vietnamese Migrant Interviewees

Note	Gender	Age	Type of visa	Time living in Korea (years)	Job	Living place	Type of house
A1	Male	33	E-1	6	Assistant Professor	Gwangju	One-room
A2	Female	37	F-2	7	Assistant professor	Seoul	Two-room
A3	Male	39	E-3	6	Post-doc	Seoul	Two-room
A4	Female	25	D-2	6	Student	Kwangju	One-room
A5	Male	24	D-4	1	Student	Incheon	One-room
A6	Male	23	D-2	4	Student	Cheonlabuk-do	One-room
A7	Female	28	D-2	4	Student	Seoul	One-room
A8	Male	35	F-6	13	Worker	Incheon	Two-room
A9	Male	38	Vietnamese-Korean	10	Worker	Seoul	Two-room
A10	Female	35	Vietnamese-Korean	9	Household	Kyeonggy-do	One-room
A11	Male	32	E-9	4	Worker	Tags	Company dorm
A12	Male	50	Vietnamese Korean	25	Business	Seoul	Two-room
A13	Female	33	D-8	8	Business	Seoul	One-room
A14	Female	28	F-1	4	Household	Incheon	Two-room
A15	Female	35	F-2	5	Household	Busan	Two-room

into the broader lives of the participants. All interviews were recorded and then translated into English.

In addition, the interviewees are referred to with symbols from A1 to A15 in order to protect their confidentiality. Interviewees' demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Results

Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants' Jobs and Income

Korea was the second country in the world to experience an outbreak of COVID-19 acute respiratory infection, and the country where the epidemic "rose" in most provinces for the longest time. For more than a

year and a half, the Korean government has tried to enforce the most effective policies to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Korea is one of the few countries that succeeded in realizing the dual goal of fighting the epidemic while promoting economic growth.

Although Korea has logged more than 1,000 daily cases since early July 2021, it has seen a downward trend in its coronavirus infections after the fourth pandemic wave peaked in late September 2021 (Yonhap News Agency, 2021). However, when the epidemic spread rapidly, the government had to implement social distancing regulations at the highest level (level 4) in the Seoul metropolitan area and surrounding areas and in Busan, the largest city in the South. Under social distancing at level 4, private meetings after 6 pm are only allowed for up to two people, meaning that gatherings of three or more people are completely banned. However, it is still allowed to meet privately with four people before 6 pm. Except for one-person demonstrations, all gatherings and events are banned, and only immediate family members are allowed to attend weddings and funerals. The Korean government also decided to maintain the ban on gatherings at entertainment facilities and temporarily suspend privilege measures attendant upon vaccination (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021).

As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected businesses and the employment of workers in the service industries, where migrants make up the majority. In particular, COVID-19 has affected small and medium-sized businesses and restaurants. The restricting opening of business time at restaurants and cafes has displaced people, posing the threat of job loss and increased unemployment.

The research results show that Vietnamese students are the most vulnerable and affected group in the Vietnamese immigrant community. The closure of universities and the shift from offline to online learning have made Vietnamese students less likely to meet friends, exchange knowledge, and receive mentoring, advice, and support from professors teaching the subjects.

I only study online, so I do not go to school, and it is difficult to meet professors and Korean friends. Sometimes, I do not understand the online lectures, but I do not know how to do to understand all the lectures. (A7, age 28, D-2, Seoul)

This has resulted in difficulty understanding and absorbing online lectures. Therefore, most student interviewees reported that studying online has made them feel bored. Moreover, some of them opened lecture videos mainly for attendance.

I listened to the lecture but did not understand anything. The material also did not have much to refer to, and I was worried about working more. So, sometimes I opened the video there or went to the Zoom class for attendance, but actually I did not study because I could not understand everything the professors say there. (A4, age 25, D-2, Gwangju)

Vietnamese students said their online learning results during the COVID-19 pandemic were lower than with face-to-face learning in the past.

This semester is online again. There are subjects studied via Zoom. There are subjects studied through lecture videos posted by the professor. I listened to the lecture but could not understand the whole lesson. Furthermore, when I took the final exams in class, I could not do them well and I could not get high grades. (A5, age 24, D-2, Incheon).

Moreover, most Vietnamese students studying abroad must pay for their living expenses and tuition fees. However, with the increase in the number of people infected with COVID-19, social distancing was upgraded to level 4, causing many restaurants to close. Therefore, many Vietnamese students faced reduced working hours and even unemployment for a certain period.

Vietnamese student A6 shared that the restaurant where he worked

had to close because the orders were too small. He has been unemployed for some months. However, to cover living expenses and pay for housing and tuition, he had to find a job delivering food to guests to earn money and maintain his present life.

I lost my job for months because the restaurant had to close. It was the most difficult time for me. I had to borrow money from friends to cover living expenses. Then I had to find another job. I can ride a motorbike well. So, I work as a food delivery driver for other restaurants. (A6, age 23, D-2, Cheonlabuk-do)

Unemployment and no income also make it difficult for international students to apply for a reverse subsidy from their families in Vietnam, as the case of interviewee A5 shares below.

All the restaurants were closed. I have not found a job yet. I have to reduce all the expenses. I had to call my parents to send me money for living expenses when I ran out of money. Sometimes I borrowed money from friends. I hope to find a job soon (A5, age 24, D-2, Incheon).

The research results show that international students to married migrants find it difficult to maintain a stable manual job, leading to unemployment and economic and income difficulties.

In addition, people working under a work visa also said that their companies had difficulties in production, so their overtime hours were significantly reduced from before COVID-19. They have thus maintained the minimum basic income. Even some new workers lost their jobs because the company did not have enough workload for all workers, leading to layoffs.

In the past, my company had many customer orders, so everyone could work overtime and have a better income. From mid-2020 until now, they cut my hours. Many new workers had to quit their jobs. I have been working here for a long

time. However, due to COVID-19, my working time has been cut, and my salary has been reduced significantly. Now I only have a basic salary. (A11, age 32, E-9, Taegu)

In particular, the migrants holding business or investment visas and operating their own companies or restaurants are in the most challenging situation.

My Vietnamese restaurant has been in a challenging time with only a few customers coming in to eat per day. The money I earn here is insufficient to pay the staff and maintain the restaurant. I have had to borrow money for many months to pay for one employee and the cost of renting this restaurant. Moreover, there are many months without any profit. It is tough for us. Sometimes I want to close the restaurant, but if I closed the restaurant, it would be difficult to find a job, and I have spent too much money on this restaurant. (A12, age 50, Vietnamese Korean, Seoul)

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected Vietnamese business people operating export companies, mainly those exporting Korean cosmetics to Vietnam or other countries. Indeed, we found that most Vietnamese businesspeople had to cease exporting cosmetics and beauty care products to Vietnam because the price of shipping producers has greatly increased and the time for shipping producers to both countries has taken longer. The shipping of many cosmetics has been delayed and their buyers did not receive the cosmetic products on time. Moreover, they noted that because social distancing and masks are required daily to prevent the spread of COVID-19, consumers do not need to use many cosmetics. Therefore, these businesses must close or flexibly switch to trading other types of goods and services.

I have just transferred to a D-8 visa and opened a cosmetics-beauty equipment export company to Vietnam from the

beginning of 2020. However, because the COVID- 19 epidemic continued and with the recent outbreak in Vietnam, we had to close this cosmetic business item. I cannot export Korean cosmetics to Vietnam. People do not have enough money to eat, so they do not buy cosmetics. Recently, we have had to switch marketing services to introduce beauty and cosmetic care service packages such as braces and chin corrections for Vietnamese customers in Korea to cosmetic hospitals in Kangnam. (A13, age 33, D-8, Seoul)

In contrast to the above groups of Vietnamese migrants, a small number of Vietnamese migrants who work as researchers, post-doctoral fellows, or university lecturers said they were almost unaffected. The COVID -19 pandemic has not affected their income much, and their salary and jobs remain stable. However, their opportunities to attend international conferences abroad and collect data through face-to-face interviews are greatly limited because of COVID-19.

My income and jobs have not been affected much. Because I am doing research in the lab, from 2020 I have not been able to attend conferences or go overseas because international conferences cannot open offline, and instead have changed to online conferences. My economy and income have not changed because that is my field and occupation. (A1, age 33, E-1, Gwangju)

A3's experiences under the impact of COVID-19 on his income and job are similar to A1's. At the same time, A2, working as an assistant professor, mentioned that she had to change teaching methods to online, which has given her much more work than lecturers.

COVID-19 does not affect my income. Nevertheless, I have to change the teaching method from offline to an online class. Moreover, of course, I must prepare all lecturers harder than before and cannot meet and help my students face-to-face much.

(A2, age 37, F-2, Seoul).

Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants' Daily Lives

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a range of factors that can affect migrants' ability to prevent infection and access adequate health care, and has also had an effect on the economic, social, and psychological aspects of the pandemic, including living and working conditions, linguistic and cultural diversity in service delivery, xenophobia, local knowledge and networks, limited resources, and access to appropriate health care (Guadagno, 2020). After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in South Korea and other countries worldwide, Vietnam suspended most flights between the two countries to minimize coronavirus spread. Restrictions and bans on international flights have made many Vietnamese migrants in Korea worry and fall into psychological crisis and stress.

Interviewees all shared that when COVID-19 broke out in Korea in March 2020 and the number of people infected with COVID-19 increased rapidly in Taegu City, they experienced panic and fear. Many people had difficulty deciding whether to stay in Korea or return to Vietnam, because their relatives in Vietnam asked them every day to return to Vietnam.

I was terrified. When COVID-19 broke out in Taegu and people died, my mother and sisters in Vietnam called me constantly and told me to go home. They told me it was very safe in Vietnam, and that I needed to protect my health first. I was so confused that I tried to book a plane ticket. But I could not buy one because the airplane tickets from Korea to Vietnam were so expensive and there were a few airplane from South Korea to Vietnam during this time. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the most expensive round-trip flight ticket to Vietnam was only \$400 or \$600. However, during this COVID-19 pandemic, a one-way flight ticket to Vietnam cost nearly \$2,000, even over \$2,000. Furthermore, there are too many people hop-

ing to buy one and go home. (A7, age 28, D2, Seoul)

Interviewee A14 was in a similar situation, but in the end she decided not to return to Vietnam because she was worried about her husband staying alone.

Whenever I call my mother in Vietnam, my mother, brothers, and sisters always tell me to return to Vietnam immediately. They said it was safe in Vietnam, but Korea was in a dangerous situation due to the spread of COVID-19. However, my husband was still working. If my children and I returned to Vietnam, my husband would live alone. Who would take care of him if he fell sick or was infected with COVID-19? I was so worried about that. Finally, we decided that the whole family would come back together if we returned to Vietnam. Otherwise, the whole family would stay together in Korea. (A14, age 28, F1, Incheon)

Meanwhile, marriage migrant A15 shared that she was heavily stressed when she saw her mother crying and demanding that she be allowed to return to Vietnam every day. A15 said her mother came to Korea after the Lunar New Year in 2020 to care for her baby because she had given birth nearly a year before, which involved a complicated and expensive process of obtaining invitation documents. However, the outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemic put her mother under stress because of health worries: Her mother was over 70 years old and had high blood pressure, and worried that she would die in Korea if she contracted COVID-19. Moreover, she wanted to spend the rest of her life or die in her hometown with her family

My mother asked how many people died from COVID-19 every day. My house is in a densely populated area, so my mother was afraid to go out because she could catch the coronavirus, so she stayed at home many days on end. However, she was bored staying home alone with no friends to talk to. She was

angry, irritable, and crying. My mother asked me to buy a plane ticket for her to go home immediately, or she would die here for me to see. She said she wanted to go back to Vietnam, even to eat vegetables and porridge, but she had to stay close to her sisters and family. I tried my best to buy the airplane ticket; it has been difficult for me since May 2020. Seeing my mother crying and irritable daily has made me stressed and miserable. Finally, I was able to buy a 1,950,000 won one-way ticket for my mother to return to Vietnam in October 2020. (A15, age 35, F2, Busan)

The restriction or cessation of international flights from Korea to Vietnam has increased air ticket prices by 4 to 5 times from before the pandemic. The number of tickets is very small, while the demand to return home is increasing among Vietnamese migrants in Korea, which has greatly increased air ticket prices and made them hard to come by. Vietnamese migrants were worried about their health and did not fully understand how to control the disease in Korea.

The results also show that migrants with families in Korea often fall into a greater sense of crisis and psychological than single migrants or students. Interviewees with families said that sudden unemployment or job loss causes crisis and difficulties in family income (Adey, Hannam, Sheller, & Tyfield, 2021). Accordingly, the conflicts between husband and wife also increase when complex economic problems arise.

A9 said she and her husband were Vietnamese and had two children in Korea. They had a relatively stable and peaceful life before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, her career and family income were difficult, causing many quarrels and stress in her married life. She suddenly lost her job when her cosmetics company went bankrupt, leaving the entirety of their living expenses, rent, and school fees for her two children to be paid from her husband's income. Furthermore, her husband's company reduced employee overtime, leaving him earning only a basic salary. At the same time,

because they are all foreigners, they could not receive any support from the Korean government during the pandemic.

We often quarrel because we do not know what to spend and what should we cut back on? The first son needs school tuition fees; the second son needs money for milk, diapers, and kindergarten fees, up to nearly 500,000 won/month. I am unemployed again. My husband's working hours were reduced. Moreover, his salary is only about 2,000,000 won/month. I lost my job and needed another job, but it was too difficult because I am a foreigner and my Korean language ability is not as perfect as Korean people's. I am also afraid of catching the COVID-19 virus. We have never felt so tired and overwhelmed before. (A9, age 38, Vietnamese-Korean, Seoul)

Similarly, A9 is a marriage migrant who is a Korean citizen and has lived in Korea for more than 15 years. She has three children. She and her husband work as factory workers. Their working hours have been reduced, which has impacted all the expenses for their three children, insurance, and house rent. Furthermore, their relationship has been impaired by quarrels due to lack of money and rising expenses.

My husband is usually very gentle. However, these days, he is always angry and irritable. The three children are not going to school. They study online, so we must hire home teachers to tutor weekly. Each month, we have to pay up to one million won for extra lessons in math, Hangul, piano, and taekwondo for all three children, while we still have to pay for insurance, husband's gas, rent, and meals. We save as much as possible, but we still have a shortage, so we just argue a lot about living fees every day. (A9, age 38, Vietnamese-Korean, Seoul)

In addition, Vietnamese migrants with young children are also under pressure to care for them at home and face many difficulties when they are sick and have to go to the hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviewees A1 and A8 share the same anxiety and stress from fears of catching COVID-19 and their children being affected.

Right after the first outbreak in Korea, I was apprehensive. Whenever I meet someone, I was afraid even though I was wearing a full mask. My wife and I have two young children, so I am afraid that if I accidentally get infected COVID-19 virus, I will bring this disease back to my children, and if we are quarantined, I worry who would take care of our children, because we have no relatives in Korea. (A8, age 35, F-6, Incheon)

Interviewee A9 is afraid that if they catch COVID-19, they will be isolated, making it hard to take care of their young children because they have no relatives or family in Korea. At the same time, interviewee A2 worried that if she were infected by COVID-19 at the factory where she works, how could she take care of her three young children? Recently, her family in Ho Chi Minh City, where the COVID-19 outbreak is most severe, made her even more worried about her parents' safety in her homeland.

I am worried. It is a stressful time. We have three children; one is in kindergarten, one is in 1st grade, and one is in 3rd grade. They study online at home while we go to work. And there are so many workers working in my factory, so it is terrifying. We have to take care of three children and care for my whole family in Vietnam because there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Thus, I always feel stressed. Moreover, my husband and I often quarrel because of economic difficulties and taking care of children since COVID-19 arose. (A9, age 38, Vietnamese-Korean, Seoul)

Interviewee A10 is a single mother. She went to Korea on a marriage visa and had a nine-year-old daughter. Because she was unhappy, she separated from her Korean husband and took her children to Seoul to

work. However, she became unemployed under COVID-19, and she fell into a psychological crisis when she had no job or income to cover her life. She stated that she wanted to find a job, but her daughter studied online at home alone. As there was no one to take care of her daughter, she could not go to work for a long time.

I am so stressed because I cannot always find a job. If I go to work, I have to work at least 8 hours daily due to day and night shifts. But my daughter is only in 1st grade and learning online. She stays at home alone; who will take care of her for me? If I do not go to work, we live a difficult life. I feel so conflicted during these times. (A10, age 35, Vietnamese Korean, Kyeong-gi do).

Notably, the COVID -19 pandemic and the limitation of Korean language ability have put the migration families under difficulties in accessing medical care in Korea (Nguyen, Krieger, Nguyen, & Shin, 2022). A14 shared the most stressful and anxious days she experienced with her 3-year-old son when he had sudden abdominal pain, vomiting, crying, and fainting that required acute hospitalization. It took a long time to get her son treated because the COVID-19 test procedure for all patients showed signs of fever when they were admitted to the hospital.

The most terrible thing was taking my child to the emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. My child was three years old. He had a high fever, abdominal pain, and vomiting. He cried a lot. I had to bring my child to the pediatric clinic of the university hospital near my home, but they insisted that they would not allow my child to be admitted to the hospital. I wanted to tell them that my child was so tired, he had no strength and had a high fever; please save my child. However, I could not explain it in Korean. Anyway, they asked my child to take the COVID-19 test first and wait for the test results; then they would allow my child to get health care. At that time,

my son was too tired to cry. After the COVID-19 test, I cried too, hugged him outside the park gate, and waited and waited. Then finally, the emergency department agreed to let my child in; they gave me injections, water, and some protein, and after a few hours, my baby opened his eyes again. I am afraid of my children or family members getting sick because it is unbearable. (A14, age 28, F-1, Incheon)

This shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused great difficulties and limitations for immigrants in accessing appropriate health care services, especially for migrant children when they suffer critical health situations. The use of the Korean language to transmit updated information about COVID-19 and medical and healthcare information presents even more of a difficulty for them.

The impact of the Korean government's policies against COVID-19 on international migrants in Korea

With the Korean government's epidemic policy effectively controlling the spread of the disease, the COVID-19 pandemic in Korea has been controlled and has tended to decrease. When the epidemic was spreading most widely, the Korean government implemented social distancing regulations at the highest level (level 4) in the Seoul metropolitan area and surrounding areas, as well as in Busan and other large cities; the Korean economy has never completely closed. The economic lifelines are still active, and the production chain and the circulation of goods have never been broken, though they might have been adversely impacted here or there for a short time.

Moreover, under the social distancing policies, most agencies, offices, factories, supermarkets, trade centers, traditional markets, restaurants, and delivery services stayed open and continued operating, even though they had to limit the number of customers and impose time limitation. They usually use medical declarations and other infection prevention measures such as antibacterial air purifiers, hand sanitizers, spraying sub-

stances, antibacterial wraps, and masks.

However, to avoid a complete shutdown, South Korea had to take other measures to control the epidemic, tracing infections effectively using information technology and a cognitive testing system. People entering and exiting stores, offices, and factories must scan the QR code and save their contact phone number so that the health authority can notify them for testing if they become F1 or F2¹⁾Yes, I add it by footnote. Thank you for your review!

Please add a brief explanation of this.. Alternatively, the Korean epidemic prevention agency quickly identified those who had been in contact with people classified as F0²⁾ through cell phone locations, bank card usage history, and CCTV.

In addition to public and private hospitals, COVID-19 testing facilities have been set up in many places and localities (including roadsides) to facilitate the fastest and easiest ways to test the general population. All people, including foreigners without legal residency documents, are encouraged to get tested when showing signs of infection. Test takers only need to leave a contact phone number without having to declare other personal information if they do not want to.

In addition, the Korean government allows rapid tests at home. When the test is positive, mild patients can be treated at home under the remote guidance of the medical team, while in severe cases, these F0s will be taken to a hospital for care with the best available medical equipment and drugs (including COVID-19 treatment drugs produced and manufactured in Korea). Korea offers free COVID-19 treatment for health insurance participants (including foreigners) and applies a “reciprocal re-

1) F1: Suspected of COVID-19 or having close contact with F0 (should wear mask, maintain a distance to other people for at least 2m, should go to the hospital for isolation, inform to the Government and F2 about their situation.

F2: Having close contact with F1 (should wear mask, maintain a distance to other people for at least 2m, should stay at home for isolation and inform to the Government and F3 about their situation.

2) F0: positive with COVID-19 (isolation and treat tin the hospital)

gime” such that if Korean citizens receive free treatment abroad, then that nation’s citizens in Korea will receive treatment for free with the cost of testing and treatment while in Korea.

Koreans are regularly updated on the epidemic situation in their locality, when and where F0s go, where to wear masks when going out, and where people can wash their hands with an antiseptic solution. Social distancing measures are based on people’s self-discipline and sense of responsibility, divided into levels, and applied depending on the epidemic situation and the health capacity of each locality. Moreover, all agencies, organizations, and people must comply with regulations.

As a result, the number of people infected with COVID-19 has tended to decrease, and widespread vaccination has played an essential role in minimizing the community transmission of COVID-19, which has contributed significantly to reducing stress among both Koreans and foreign migrants. Research results also show that most interviewees felt secure because they were vaccinated against COVID-19 and no longer worried about the COVID-19 pandemic as strongly as they had in 2020. Therefore, the migrants reported less negative thinking and improved psychological health. Furthermore, they were familiar with regulations such as wearing masks, sanitary hygiene, and COVID-19 testing after notification.

International student A6 shared that she was no longer as worried and concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic as before. At present, she is focusing on studying and working part-time while updating information about COVID-19 on a Vietnamese social network in Korea (Nguyen & Lim, 2017).

I always updated all information about COVID-19 on the Facebook group of Vietnamese people here, and I took the second dose of the vaccine one week ago. Now, I am not anxious and insecure as I was before. I still go to school and work at the restaurant every day. (A6, age 23, D2, Cheonlabuk- do)

Furthermore, interviewee A15 also said she no longer intends to

return to Vietnam and her stress is relieved now that the COVID-19 epidemic is better controlled. Moreover, more COVID-19 patients are recovering in South Korea than in Vietnam.

I see the number of people getting the COVID-19 virus increasing much more this year in Korea. Every day, there are over one thousand or a hundred thousand people infected with COVID-19, but the number of deaths is decreasing, and the Korean government is implementing an excellent epidemic control policy. Therefore, my family and I are not as worried about being infected with COVID-19 as before. We always wear full masks when going out, wash our hands with sanitizer, and do not eat or gather outside. (A15, age 35, F2, Busan)

In addition, Vietnamese migrants who live in rural or sparsely populated areas indicated that they were not under psychological pressure or worried too much about the COVID-19 pandemic such as living in the Seoul metropolitan area.

Oh, it is lucky for us because there are very few people infected with COVID-19. I find my life is not very stressful because it is very peaceful here. (A1, age 33, E1, Gwangju).

The above interviewee A1 said that she lived in Gwangju, and the small number of people infected with COVID-19 there has not changed her life, and she did not seem to be under psychological crisis. This shows that the migrants living in Seoul metropolitan area have suffered much more damaging effects from the COVID-19 pandemic than migrants living in other cities or the countryside in Korea.

Conclusions

The study has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted Vietnamese migrants' work, income, daily life, and health care access in Korea.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic left many migrants, especially students and married women, unemployed when restaurants had to close or reduce their hours of operation. Meanwhile, workers have had their working hours cut, and some workers have also lost their jobs and had to find new jobs. As a result, their income has been dramatically reduced and is unstable. In particular, it is even more difficult for migrants with families to have small children. In addition, business migrants who opened restaurants or import-export companies have faced difficulties in maintaining their businesses or have gone bankrupt because of the pandemic. In contrast, migrants with advanced degrees and working in positions such as researchers, post-doctoral fellows, and lecturers at research institutes and universities said their incomes and occupations were not severely affected, unlike other migrant groups. However, they lost the opportunity to go abroad to attend international conferences because of the current state of movement restrictions between countries, and lack the opportunity to collect data in the real world due to social distance restrictions and the spread of COVID-19.

Second, economic, occupational, and income difficulties have caused family conflicts for many migrant and multicultural families when income is insufficient to pay household expenses because living expenses and child care fees increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, arguments and conflicts between husbands and wives tend to increase after the COVID-19 pandemic appeared.

Third, access to health care is the big challenge and difficulty for migrant families, especially those with sick children, during the pandemic. The strict regulations regarding testing for COVID-19 patients in emergency conditions pose a serious challenge to migrant families' children's health. The limitations of language in medical access and communication and the absence of relatives and friends during the pandemic also caused them great anxiety and fear. Furthermore, many migrants said they were apprehensive about testing positive for COVID-19 from fear of infecting their children and families. At the same time, they do not have any relatives in Korea to help them if they are quarantined.

Lastly, the closure of flight routes between Vietnam and South Korea has caused most Vietnamese migrants to suffer mental crises, stress, and anxiety because they could not return to Vietnam and were afraid of contracting coronavirus from 2020 until early 2021. However, practical and flexible anti-COVID-19 policies have not locked down the entire economy. The policies such as using the mask to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and medical care support services regardless of migration status have helped migrants return to some degree of mental equilibrium. They believe that the Korean government's anti-epidemic policy adheres to proper anti-epidemic principles, and they are gradually adapting to the return to a better life.

This study suggests the need for economic support policies for migrants, especially migrant families and migrant children, so that they do not fall into poverty, hard work, and stress. Information about COVID-19 should be translated into different languages so immigrants can easily access better pandemic prevention information. Furthermore, the government needs to implement policies to support migrants when they fall into unemployment and difficulties under current circumstances. In particular, the Korean government should devote much closer attention to migrant children because they are the group suffering the most negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper has the limitation that it is based upon interviews with Vietnamese migrants and did not consider all international migrants in Korea. Therefore, future research is needed to examine a wider range of international migrants using both qualitative and quantitative methods to identify their difficulties and challenges while living and studying in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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