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Abstract	Previous studies on non-regular workers have reported that the workers may suffer from negative identities. However, compared with the number of studies on structural causes, relatively fewer studies have examined negative identities among non-regular workers. Hence, raising the practical question of how such workers can recover from negative identities is an important research task. This study investigates the participation in social welfare volunteer activities as a potential method for facilitating such recovery, that is, participation in volunteer activities can afford opportunities for interactions with people. Furthermore, in contrast to peer groups, volunteer groups are not based on shared stigmatization. The author conducted semi-structured interviews with seven individuals in a volunteer group several times between July and December 2014. All participants were unmarried, and most of them lived with their parents. This living arrangement might have enabled them to become involved in volunteer activities while working part time. The interviews revealed that the participants felt that others viewed them negatively in society. They also developed negative identities as consequences of their work and careers, mental problems, and/or lack of communication and relationships with others. However, participation in volunteer activities enabled them to ease certain aspects of their negative identities; in particular, such participation gave them a space where they could forge relationships with people and help others. One unique aspect of volunteer groups is that they do not exclude anyone and accept people who want to help or interact with others. However, volunteering has certain limitations, and participation alone is not a perfect solution. Despite the positive effects, there are aspects of volunteering that warrant critical examination. First, relationships formed through volunteering may not last long. Second, satisfaction with volunteer activities may encourage non-regular workers to remain nonregular workers. Finally, participation in volunteer activities requires being active enough to be involved in the first place. This study had certain limitations. In particular, the number of participants was small; hence, both qualitative and quantitative research are necessary to support the findings.
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Non-Regular Workers Recovering from Negative Identities: Interviews in a Volunteer Group

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Rio Yoshitake

Previous studies on non-regular workers have reported that the workers may suffer from negative identities. However, compared with the number of studies on structural causes, relatively fewer studies have examined negative identities among non-regular workers. Hence, raising the practical question of how such workers can recover from negative identities is an important research task. This study investigates the participation in social welfare volunteer activities as a potential method for facilitating such recovery, that is, participation in volunteer activities can afford opportunities for interactions with people. Furthermore, in contrast to peer groups, volunteer groups are not based on shared stigmatization.

The author conducted semi-structured interviews with seven individuals in a volunteer group several times between July and December 2014. All participants were unmarried, and most of them lived with their parents. This living arrangement might have enabled them to become involved in volunteer activities while working part time. The interviews revealed that the participants felt that others viewed them negatively in society. They also developed negative identities as consequences of their work and careers, mental problems, and/or lack of communication and relationships with others. However, participation in volunteer activities enabled them to ease certain aspects of their negative identities; in particular, such participation gave them a space where they could forge relationships with people and help others.

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1.　Introduction

The number of non-regular workers has increased by about threefold in the past 30 years from 6.55 million workers in 1985 to 19.62 million in 2014 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau 2015a, 2015b). At the beginning of the 2000s, studies on young non-regular workers (*freeters*) began to be published (Kosugi ed. 2002; Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training 2000, etc.). Since then, the number of studies in this field has increased. Many studies have examined social structural causes pertaining to non-regular workers (Taromaru 2009; Kosugi and Hori 2002; Honda 2005 etc.). Non-regular workers face not only financial instability and difficulties in improving their situations but also exclusion through "remarks" (Honda 2009). With the negative nuances of the terms *freeter* and NEET, non-regular workers have been viewed negatively, as having had problems with their careers and as lacking effort or motivation. In turn, non-regular workers themselves internalize this negative social gaze to form negative self-images (Masuda 2012). To explore identity issues among non-regular workers, this study examines non-regular employees who are participating or who have participated in volunteering activities. Housewives and full-time students were excluded, as they differ from non-regular workers in regard to their career situation. In this study, the term "non-regular workers" encompasses *freeters*.

2.　Previous Studies

2-1.　Negative Identity among Non-Regular Workers

Recent research on non-regular workers has tended to use the concept of social exclusion, which encompasses economic, social, cultural and political aspects, in place of the concept of poverty, which is focused only on economic exclusion. Given the cultural aspect of social exclusion, the importance of considering individuals identities has been pointed out (Higuchi 2004). Higuchi cites the development of "negative identity" in Paugam's research on people who had lost regular jobs[1]; this loss caused such people to exhibit reduced self-esteem and reduced motivation to work; in some cases, people became socially isolated. Losing one's occupational status has a serious impact on one's identity: the deterioration of one's social status can lead an individual to internalize negative feelings about the loss of their occupational status (Higuchi 2004). In other words, being a non-regular worker or being unemployed can result in lower self-esteem and an increased sense of isolation.

Moreover, qualitative studies have revealed that non-regular workers exhibit anxiety (Masuda 2012) and negative self-images (Nida 2010), as they have been unable to obtain approval from their parents, friends, and society. Non-regular workers strongly internalize social norms regarding work and view themselves negatively as people who have been unable to become regular workers (Masuda 2012). About 80% of young non-regular workers mentioned that people's views toward *freeters* were harsh

(Shimomura 2002) and that their own views toward *freeters* were, in line with the general perception, negative (Shimomura 2002).

As stated above, certain past studies have indicated that non-regular workers have a negative identity; nevertheless, compared with the literature on structural causes, the literature on negative identity remains insufficient. While the problems of non-regular workers with negative identities have been indicated, there remain few clues regarding how such workers can recover their identities.

2-2. Methods to Recover from Negative Identities

Studies on non-regular workers have considered participation in labor unions as a method for non-regular workers to recover from negative identities. In a case study of two young non-regular workers, Hashiguchi (2014) found that labor union participation enabled them to realize that their problems at work were not personal matters but social issues that they could contribute to solving. Non-regular workers have also engaged in other methods to find hope and to escape from their anxiety, including participating in the activities of newly established religions, engaging in multilevel marketing, and taking medications for depression (Masuda 2012). Another study investigated a non-regular worker who sought to defend his own identity by shifting the causes behind his problems to circumstances in his family and by differentiating himself from others through studying a language (Nida 2010).

However, these methods of recovering from a negative identity have certain problems. The two workers examined in Hashiguchi's study (Hashiguchi 2014) began with a relatively substantial interest in social issues and came from higher educational backgrounds—both had entered graduate school. They were encouraged to participate in the labor union through the advice of people around them. However, as Hashiguchi (2014) indicates in the beginning of his study, for the most part, young non-regular workers and regular workers at smaller companies do not join labor unions. Methods such as engaging in the activities of newly established religions, in multilevel marketing, and in justification through shifting responsibility (Masuda 2012; Nida 2010) would seem to constitute temporary avoidance methods that would not enable recovery from a negative identity.

Recovery from negative identities has not been investigated in studies on non-regular workers. However, studies on topics such as patients with mental disorders, *hikikomori* (social recluses), and day laborers who are part of *yoseba* (*yoseba-rodosha*) have elucidated how recovery from negative identities may be enabled through participation in peer groups (Fujisawa 1992; Nishizawa 1990; Ogino 2007; Kawakita 2014). Patients with mental disorders, *hikikomori*, and day laborers who are part of *yoseba* (*yoseba-rodosha*) have similar characteristics with non-regular workers in that they are sometimes labeled as people who do not work or are lazy people and their orientation towards work is viewed negatively. Such studies have indicated that patients with mental disorders can come to a mutual understanding and attain positive identities by joining patient groups and reading bulletins (Fujisawa 1992) and that participation in peer groups can enable *hikikomori* to form friendships and relationships with peers and supporters (Ogino 2007). Moreover, Kawakita (2014) indicated that in support groups for *hikikomori*, trial and error is encouraged and participants can ease their feelings of self-

blame through the experience of finding approval. Day laborers in *yoseba* communities seek to reevaluate the value of physical labor and to accord positive value to themselves in the peer-group context (Nishizawa 1990).

In peer groups, interactions among individuals, other members, and staff have been considered to have aspects of interaction rituals. Moreover, interactions among those inside the institution differ from interactions between those inside and outside the institution (Ogino 2007). Peer groups are affected by certain problems—for example, in peer groups for patients with mental disorders, some patients have stigmatized other patients (Fujisawa 1992). In addition, it has been pointed out that modern society prioritizes individual characteristics, that people from the same groups and people with the same lifestyles are only loosely connected, and that it is getting harder to form collective identities (Ogino 2006).

There are also methods to recover from negative identities that people undertake as individuals as opposed to as part of peer groups. As one such method, *hikikomori* control information about themselves, eschew interactions with others, and avoid situations in which they expect negative interactions (Ishikawa 2003). Goffman (2001) also examines information control as a method that people use to address stigma. Discussing the connection between stigma and identity, he indicates that individuals control information about themselves—for example, by concealment—that could result in losing trust from others or negative reactions from others. Paugam's study on people who have lost regular jobs, which was cited by Higuchi (2004), employed Goffman's framework. Hence, though information control as a method has not been investigated among non-regular workers, studies on information control regarding *hikikomori* (Ishikawa 2003) and groups of patients with mental disorders (Fujisawa 1992) have been conducted. However, information control is a method that individuals undertake by themselves.

2-3.　Limitations of Methods in Previous Studies and the Methods in This Study

Hence, previous studies have cited methods to be used to recover from negative identities, but these methods have had certain limitations: they are only available to those from conducive environments, they have temporary effects, or they are undertaken alone, rendering the individual unable to form social relationships.

This raises the question: what methods can be used to recover from negative identities? This study considers participation in volunteer activities as a method to recover from negative identities. In contrast to, for example, self-help groups, which are based on shared stigmatization, volunteers in volunteer groups are not brought together based on similarities. Participation in volunteer groups can provide opportunities to interact with other people with different characteristics, such as other volunteer members and people for whom such activities are intended. Gaining approval from others in volunteer groups, which are not closed and are not based on similarities, can reveal, in a lasting way, important possibilities to those recovering from a negative identity[4].

Volunteer studies have found that in recent years, there have been decreases in the number of upper- and middle-class people, managers, and unemployed people participating in volunteer activities,

who had been major participants. Consequently, people participating in volunteer activities have become diverse in regard to income and occupation (Mitani 2014). Therefore, although volunteer activities have been considered activities supported by people with high incomes and with prestigious occupations, the latest findings have indicated that it cannot be said that people in lower classes or with other occupations do not participate in volunteer activities.

For these reasons, this study investigates volunteer activities. In particular, among volunteer activities, this study addresses a volunteer group engaged with social welfare. In social welfare volunteer activities, volunteers engage in real interactions and try to help people such as the elderly, children, and the disabled. Non-regular workers who cannot gain approval from others around them and have negative identities might be able to recover from their negative identities by helping others in a visible way.

3. Method and Participants

3-1. Method

As of 2014, Group R had 49 members. The author conducted interviews with five volunteer group members and two former members; details regarding these individuals are presented in Table 1. All five non-regular workers in Group R who agreed to be interviewed—referred to as Alex, Beth, Chris, Fred, and George—were interviewed and consent was obtained. Among three ex-members who were non-regular workers, two individuals who had been members in 2012 and 2013 but not 2014 (referred to as Dorothy and Emily) agreed to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews with each participant were conducted between one and several times between July and December 2014.

Group R is a volunteer group in P Prefecture supported by a social welfare organization. Compared to other groups supported by the same organization, Group R is distinctive in that it offers a greater range of activities, requires no special skills, and is not limited to a specific city or area in the prefecture. Thus, Group R is relatively open to a wide variety of people. It also has the characteristic that its main members are relatively young[2]. Group R's members are aged 18 or older and live, work, or go to school in P Prefecture; high school students are not permitted to participate. Members must register annually. While some members have joined after being introduced to the group by friends or colleagues, others have joined after discovering the group through the website or through flyers. Group R has 20 male and 29 female members, including 24 college students (49%), 15 employees (31%), and 10 vocational school (mainly nurse and welfare) students (20%). No housewives are members. Some members are married. All are employed outside the group. Among the employees, 10 are regular employees (20% of all members), and 5 are non-regular employees (10%). The members have varying levels of educational attainment, ranging from high school to graduate school, and range in age from 18 to 40 years. Therefore, the members of the group can be considered to have diverse characteristics.

In terms of activities, Group R organizes blood donation campaigns, supports junior and senior high school students in volunteer clubs, holds post-disaster donation drives, provides events, assists chil-

Table 1.　Interview Participants

Name[3]	Age	Sex	Educational attainment
Alex	40	M	High school
Beth	27	F	Vocational school (welfare)
Chris	26	M	College; dropped out of graduate school
Dorothy	25	F	High school; dropped out of a vocational school for nursing
Emily	25	F	College
Fred	22	M	High school; dropped out of a vocational school of welfare
George	22	M	Dropped out of high school, passed a high-school equivalency exam, and dropped out of college

dren with disabilities, and helps at welfare facilities for the elderly. In addition, Group R holds meetings regarding these activities.

3-2.　Participant Biographies

　Alex is a 40-year-old man who lives with his retired father and mother. After graduating from high school, he worked for a manufacturing company as a regular employee for seven-and-a-half years. However, the financial situation of the company took a turn for the worse, and he lost his job due to layoffs. He took up work inside a warehouse as a non-regular employee for about seven-and-a-half years. Subsequently, he twice sought regular employment, first at a manufacturing company and then at a nursing facility; however, both times, he was laid off after probationary employment periods. Afterwards, he registered at temporary staffing companies as a day worker and worked for three years. He found a job as a non-regular employee at a factory nine months ago and now works three days a week inspecting goods inside a factory.

　Beth is a 27-year-old woman who lives with her parents and a younger brother who has anthropophobia (extreme shyness or timidity) and stays at home. She went to a vocational school of welfare after graduating from high school. During her practical training at facilities for the elderly in her last year, the work she experienced there seemed physically too hard to do permanently after graduating. In addition, she wanted to make good use of her skills in sign language, which she majored in at vocational school. She could not find a job and continued working part-time at a fast food restaurant after graduation. She clarified that she worked there only to make money and that she did not intend to work there permanently. Though she has taken sign language licensing examinations every year or two years, she has not yet passed.

　Chris is a 26-year-old man who lives with his parents and a younger brother who has an intellectual disability. He lived in Malaysia with his family for eight years, came back, and went to high school in Japan. He majored in law at college, a college he noted was "not the college I had wanted to go to." He had wanted to become a public servant, but applied to other jobs, to which he was not accepted. Then, he "quit [trying to find jobs] after a month or so." Afterwards, he thought, "Now, my only choice is to become a public servant" and stud ied for the examinations. However, he failed them. He

graduated from college and started working as a non-regular employee, mainly at factories.

At the end of February, he took an examination to enter the graduate school of the college he had attended. He decided to go, but dropped out after only half a year. He again started to study to become a public servant, but was again unable to pass the examination. He started to work as a non-regular employee at a transportation company sorting loads. After about a year, he began to think about going to university to major in international affairs; at present, he is studying for examinations to transfer to a university.

Dorothy, a 25-year-old woman, lives with her parents and younger sister who has an intellectual disability. She takes turns with her mother picking up her sister at her workplace and preparing meals. After graduating from high school, she went to a three-year vocational school for nursing. In her second year, she failed to pass the practical training program at a hospital, and had to repeat the year. She repeated the practical training program last year, felt she could not do it anymore, and stopped going, deciding to drop out of the school.

She started working as a non-regular worker at a restaurant and at a fast food restaurant, and for about half a year, she thought about what to do next. She decided to become a nursery teacher. She took an examination for a correspondence education college and subsequently enrolled. She now works at a nursery three days a week and occasionally at the fast food restaurant. As she reported, "I mainly work or study at home by myself, because it's a correspondence education college; I go to school only when I have exams or classes at school."

Emily, a 25-year-old woman, lives with her grandmother and grandfather. She calls them "mother" and "father." Her mother used to live with them as well, but died when she was very young. She went to college and majored in psychology. However, she suffered from depression in the last half of her third year. Her professor allowed her to graduate without attending classes under the condition that she would write a graduation thesis. She wrote her graduation thesis on treatments for depression. While recovering, she realized the great power of food and thought of becoming a nutritionist, "but I quit because I couldn't pass the junior college exam for nutritionists in the fall of my fourth year." Unable to find a job, she again fell into depression in the middle of March after graduating. She spent about two years at home and found a job about six months ago. She now works as a non-regular worker at a computer course for jobseekers.

Fred, a 22-year-old man, lived with his mother and her boyfriend, but later set out to live by himself. He is visually impaired: he cannot see very well with his right eye and not at all with his left eye. He went to a vocational school of welfare, but in his second year, he was unable to attend some of the classes and dropped out. After spending six months looking for a job while working part-time, he found a new job at a hospital as a medical records messenger, and now works there as a non-regular worker.

George, a 22-year-old man, lived with his parents and younger sister. After entering high school, he began to suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder and dropped out of school. He passed a high school equivalency examination and took an entrance examination for a college. He majored in busi-

ness law, but decided to take a half-year leave from college at the beginning of his third year; subsequently, he dropped out. He was not interested in what he could study there and decided to study law. He studied for an examination to become an administrative scrivener while working as a non-regular worker, mainly at a restaurant. He says that going to a law school and becoming a lawyer is his dream, but that it would take a long time to accomplish. He also plans to obtain a teaching credential for nursery school, which he became interested in when he was working part-time at a nursery.

3-3.　Common Characteristics among the Participants

Prior to discussing negative identities, this section presents several common characteristics among the participants. Regarding lifestyle, the participants were all unmarried. Six—Alex, Beth, Chris, Dorothy, Emily, and George—lived with their parents. While Fred originally lived with his mother and her boyfriend, he moved out during the course of the study. Five participants—Beth, Chris, Dorothy, Emily, and George—did not contribute to their own living expenses; rather, their parents paid. Fred contributed 50,000 yen to his family every month when he lived with them and Alex indicated that he had contributed some money when he had had a higher salary. Hence, most of the participants lived with their parents depended on them for their living expenses; in terms of lifestyle, this arrangement enabled them to be non-regular workers participating in volunteer activities.

Another common characteristic was that most participants had (Chris and Fred) or had had (Beth, Dorothy, Emily, and George) mental problems. At the time of the interviews, Chris had gone to a mental clinic for four years and Fred had had low psychological well-being for many years. George dropped out of high school because of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Emily suffered from depression for half a year at college and again fell into depression at the end of her last year at college for almost two years. Beth visited to a mental clinic once, four years previously, when her boyfriend passed away. Dorothy was once told by a doctor that she "must be mentally tired." She was busy working part time, participating in volunteer activities, studying to be a nursery teacher, helping her sister, and doing housework.

Hence, many participants either had or had had mental problems. Regarding the connection between non-regular workers and mental problems, unwilling non-regular workers score worse than do regular workers on anxiety and depression—almost as badly as willingly unemployed people (Takahashi et al. 2014). Moreover, part-time workers and contract workers tend to have less confidence in their "health and physical strength" than regular workers (Meiji Yasuda Institute of Life and Wellness 2006)[4]. In addition, in similar research, 49.5% of NEETs have been found to have undergone treatment at mental clinics or psychosomatic clinics (Social Economic Productivity Center 2007). Consequently, mental problems may be considered to be present not only among the participants in this study but also among non-regular workers in general.

4.　Negative Identities among Participants

As indicated above, the participants had certain common characteristics: most lived with and were

financially dependent on their parents and most had or had had mental problems. Mental problems might also be connected with negative identities. In this chapter, the negative identities of the participants are categorized and clarified.

4-1. Negative Identities Related to Work and Career

First, some participants—Alex, Dorothy, and Fred—felt that other people viewed them negatively due to their being non-regular workers. Fred said that although he did not think of himself as dependent on his mother, he felt that others negatively viewed him as dependent: "I don't think I am, but… I guess people around my mother think I depend too much on her." For Fred, this feeling was particularly acute when he spent about five months working part time and searching for permanent work. Alex said that his career "doesn't look good to others" and that interviewers "sometimes look at me negatively. They say, 'You had several jobs, but you quit too soon.'" In other words, because of the peripatetic nature of his resume, interviewers viewed him negatively.

Alex and Dorothy also mentioned that they felt that they were negatively viewed at work, having been shouted at by regular workers. Alex said, "When I can't do well at work, I wonder whether maybe I shouldn't have come to work today." Dorothy mentioned an experience she had at the restaurant she worked at: although her knowledge and skills were sufficient to do her job, she was once told by a regular worker, "You are just a part-time worker!" Dorothy felt that she was negatively viewed and that there was a gap between herself and regular workers that she could not ignore. Some participants also mentioned that they felt that their work was completely (Alex and Beth) or partially (Dorothy) unimportant to society[5].

Another participant, Emily, indicated that she had not been negatively viewed by others as a result of being a non-regular worker, but had the following comment in regard to her work:

> It still leaves one question: 'How does it [being a non-regular worker] look to other people in society?' I want to have the experience of working as a regular worker.

Although she had not had any actual negative experiences due to being a non-regular worker, she still had the feeling that being a non-regular worker did not look good to other people in society. Another participant, Alex, spoke of experiences at work and at a job interview in which he was asked, in regard to television classes he was taking, "Is that even worth anything?" Furthermore, he indicated that people made remarks in this fashion "not only at job interviews. I think people in general would say the same things as well… All my life, no matter what I do, I have always been the kind of person who is told, 'It's all your fault.' I guess that's why people say only negative things to me." It may be said that because he has been subject to these negative comments, he perceives himself negatively— as a person with negative aspects.

In addition, some people have ended up as non-regular workers because of their low levels of academic achievement. Certain studies have indicated that non-regular workers have relatively low lev-

els of educational attainment (Kosugi and Hori 2002; Taromaru 2006). Two of the participants, Alex and Chris, said that they were not satisfied with their educations and had negative identities[6]. Alex said that he regretted not having gone to vocational school or college, mentioning that "most people graduate from college." He also said that employers would tend to hire someone with a higher level of educational attainment than himself. Chris said that he "wanted to go to a higher-level university." Furthermore, both Alex and Chris compared themselves with people they met through work and through their volunteer group. Chris said, "It is hard to live in this society," and felt that society placed a substantial emphasis on educational background: decrying his inability to do well in a society in which "all people are placed in a pyramid based on their academic background," he said that "Even if I gave up, an invisible monster would be coming after me. I cannot just run away." His negative identity is connected with his dissatisfaction with his own academic background; his anxiety was expressed as "an invisible monster" coming after him.

4-2.　Negative Identities Associated with Other Aspects

Participants' negative identities also derived from other aspects. Two—Chris and George—had negative identities as a result of their mental problems. George said, "Since I was in eighth grade, I've had a desire to commit suicide." Chris said, "I became mentally ill" and "I couldn't accept myself as I was." These experiences with mental problems seem to have contributed to the formation of their negative identities.

Moreover, even after recovering from their mental problems, their negative identities lasted in regard to communicating with other people. George became affected by obsessive-compulsive disorder soon after he entered high school and dropped out. He found himself "unable to go out," saying that he "couldn't get involved with people for three years." In his words, he entered college because "I just wanted to go to college… I wanted to live a 'normal' life" and "I just wanted to be a 'normal' college student." Despite attending college, however, "I didn't know how to get involved with people," not having been outside for three years. He said, "I continued living in the corners of groups." Moreover, as he was not interested in what he was studying, he took a half-year leave from school and then dropped out. He said that he "felt distant from his friends from college" after dropping out, and he returned to being uninvolved with other people.

Second, the participants had difficulties belonging and relating with others. Some participants—Alex, Chris, Dorothy, and Fred—did not feel that they had places where they belonged—not at home, with friends, or at work, indicating as well that they did not have very good relationships with people at work. Additionally, two participants, Alex and Chris, mentioned difficulties in forming relationships with others due to insufficient communication. Alex said that this was because "at my age, I have fewer chances to get involved with people." He does not have any siblings, so "at home, there are only two people—my parents." He also said that he was "not good at communicating with people" and had difficulties at work. Furthermore, Alex had changed jobs six times and had had difficulties in forming new relationships in new workplaces, being unable to talk during work or during most

breaks[7]. Another participant, Chris, said that he was in Malaysia with his family from the second to ninth grades and came back for high school, but "didn't like going to school" and "didn't have very good relationships with people." He said, "I wanted to be a different person at college, but I was afraid" because of his negative experiences in Malaysia and at high school. He said, "I was really afraid to have serious relationships with people."

5. Recovering from Negative Identities

The previous section discussed negative identities among the participants associated with being non-regular workers, dissatisfaction with their own academic backgrounds, mental problems, and difficulties in relationships with people. This section clarifies methods by which recovery from negative identities is possible.

5-1. Easing Worries and Ameliorating Problems

First, some of the participants—Alex, Beth, Dorothy, Emily, Fred, and George—felt that they could ease some of their worries and ameliorate problems associated with their low levels of psychological well-being by forming relationships with volunteer group members (Alex, Beth, Dorothy, Emily, Fred, George). One of them, Fred, said:

When everything has gone bad for me—as in work, family, friends, and everything—one of the volunteer group members would help me. For example, last year, when I dropped out of vocational school and was searching for a job, a member helped me by taking time to see me. We talked about my problems and worries, and I felt relieved.

In mentioning being viewed negatively by people around his mother, he said that his feeling in this regard was especially acute when he was in the process of looking for a job (4-1). However, as the above story indicates, engaging with a volunteer group member enabled him to cope with his negative identity when he was having a difficult time. Another participant, George, met a girl in Group R and told the following story:

I found out that she had a similar mental problem to myself. Before I found out, I couldn't talk about things like that to anyone, but she spoke with me about it and listened to me. Since then, I have started working and getting involved with people. After I met her, everything started to change.

After he met her, he started to "change my way of thinking" and have positive feelings; he started to get involved with people. Moreover, one participant who had graduated from college, Emily, said that even though she had close friends from college, she talked about her worries and serious problems with people in the volunteer group instead:

It is the people in the volunteer group with whom I can talk about my serious problems and wor-ries. I am close to my friends from college and I love them, but especially because of that, when I am with them, I cannot show my weaknesses to them.

Hence, while Emily could not show her weaknesses to close college friends, she was able to talk about her serious problems and worries with other volunteers.

In addition, some participants (Beth, Dorothy, and George) indicated that volunteer groups gave them a place where they belonged; others (Alex and Chris) indicated that volunteer groups gave them a place to get involved with other people. Some had drifted apart from their school friends after grad-uating or dropping out; others felt that they did not have close relationships at work or that they did not belong. However, volunteer groups gave them a place to belong and a chance to forge close rela-tionships. One of the participants, Dorothy, said that she did not have close relationships with friends or people at work, but that the volunteer group was a place where she belonged:

There was a girl who said, 'I don't have a place where I belong, either at home or with friends.' For her and me, we felt like we had such places in the volunteer group (Group R). The group was something like a place I could call my own and feel comfortable in. I wanted to feel I had friends there.

Despite her difficulties at home with her family, in relationships at work, and in maintaining relation-ships with her friends from the vocational school that she had dropped out of, the volunteer group of-fered her a place where she could feel she belonged.

Others (Alex and Chris) mentioned that participation in volunteer activities afforded them a place where they could talk and interact with people. Alex said, "My hope is to get involved with people, even if only during volunteer activities." Alex and Chris in particular mentioned that they had had difficulties forming relationships with people at work. Although they were not satisfied with their re-lationships and felt that they could not communicate with people at work, participation in volunteer activities made them feel as if they had a place where they could talk and interact with others.

5-2.　Being of Help to Others

Many participants (Alex, Beth, Chris, Dorothy, Fred, and George) said that volunteering gave them a sense that they were helping others. As Fred stated:

For me, volunteering might be the only thing that I live for. Volunteering gives me the feeling that I am of use to others—that I am needed by others. Without this feeling, life is too hard to con-tinue. Volunteering saved me. I have faced some hard things, and I have sometimes wondered whether it is worth it for me to be alive.

Fred said that he had had the desire to commit suicide for many years. However, participating in volunteer activities gave him the feeling that he was of use and needed; volunteering became "the only thing that I live for." Beth was given a blood transfusion during heart surgery and said the following:

I have to think about finding a job [as a regular worker], but in volunteering, I have found something I really want to do. If I had to choose between work and volunteering, I would choose volunteering. In blood donation, hearing from people like myself, who have actually been given blood transfusions, could have a greater influence on blood donors.

Having experienced surgery and having actually been saved by a blood transfusion, Beth found volunteering fulfilling and sought to directly contribute; she was motivated to the extent that she placed a greater emphasis on volunteer activities than work. Chris said, that volunteer activities showed him that "There were things that even a person like me could do. I wanted to do them." Despite the implication of his words—that he had doubts about whether he, "a person like him," could even do work—engaging in volunteer activities eased his worries.

Though Alex had almost exclusively worked in product fabrication, once, he "thought I wanted to do work that could be of help to people." He tried to work at a nursing facility for the elderly, but found that he was unable to work well in this regard. He said:

I once tried to work at a nursing facility for elderly people, but because it's a job that requires working with people, I couldn't do well. Prior to that, I had worked with products for my entire life. Products don't say anything, but people do. In working with a person, I might want to do things in a certain way, but if the person protests, there isn't anything I can do.

Alex had one experience in which he was told by an elderly person that they did not want Alex to help them because they felt Alex was no good at helping with things." Despite having wanted to do work to help other people, Alex found that he was unsuited to it; nevertheless, because he wanted to be of use to others, he decided to volunteer. Among volunteer activities, there were some that he felt he could not perform well because of his lack of communication skills. However, he indicated that he chose those activities that he was capable of doing and could talk, on occasion, with other volunteers to get advice on which activities to participate in. By participating in volunteer activities that he is capable of, he got the feeling that he was capable of helping others through volunteer activities.

The participants had negative identities associated with being non-regular workers, dissatisfaction with their own academic background, mental problems, and difficulties in relationships with others. However, they are finding that recovery from negative identities is possible through participation in volunteer activities: such participation has, to a certain extent, eased their worries, ameliorated their problems, given them a place where they belong, and enabled them to communicate with others. Participation in volunteer activities has allowed them to forge relationships with and to be of help to others.

5-3.　Possibilities and Limitations of Volunteering

One unique aspect of volunteer groups is that they are places where people who want to help or interact with others gather; thus, they tend not to reject people. The middle-aged participant, Alex, had participated in a dance club and took courses at a university via television. He mentioned that these activities had certain limitations. He joined the dance club when he was 30 years old in order to "get involved with people" through activities there. However, he was not good enough, and teachers and students tried to talk him out of going to the class. Further, he said that taking television classes and studying there did not lead to new relationships with people. He says he mainly studied by himself and "tended to withdraw into a shell."

He said that he was not good at communicating with people. What is it that enables people with poor communication skills to continue participating in volunteer activities? Alex says that, compared to people at work and in the cultural club, those in volunteer groups tend to talk to him and listen to him. He also said the following:

> *In Group R, they try not to let people be by themselves. They talked to me to try to ensure that I didn't feel alone.*

Other participants (Dorothy and George) also said that Group R was a place where "everyone is welcome" and that the group "doesn't say 'no' to anyone." Volunteer groups where people are willing to help or interact with other people may be unique in that they do not reject people because of their lack of skills or because of their personalities. As mentioned by certain participants, good relationships with others in the volunteer group, a special concern for others, and active communication among members enable those with poor communication skills to stay. Moreover, because volunteer activities encompass various kinds of activities, participants can choose the activities they want to do or think they are capable of doing, sometimes getting advice from other members. These aspects enable participants with poor communication skills to stay in volunteer groups.

Nevertheless, participation in volunteer activities also has certain limiting aspects. Relationships among volunteer group members and satisfaction they afford can vary in duration. Furthermore, among participants in the study, volunteering was enabled by their lifestyles as non-regular workers. First, most participants (Alex, Chris, Dorothy, Emily, Fred, and George) mentioned that they had difficulty balancing their volunteer activities and the work or examination preparations that they needed to focus on. Some (Chris, Dorothy, Emily, Fred, and George) even considered stopping their participation in volunteer activities for a time because of these reasons. One participant, Dorothy, said that she felt like she had failed in her volunteer activities and did not feel like attending again. Finally, after forging new relationships and finding satisfaction in volunteering, some participants—Beth, Dorothy, Emily, and George—began putting too much emphasis on it. This perpetuated their time as non-regular workers. In placing greater importance on volunteer activities, they placed less importance on work, finding jobs, or studying for examinations. For example, as George said:

I had things I should have been doing [i.e., studying for exams or working] but that I failed to do. I wanted to participate in volunteer activities with people.

One participant, Beth, even mentioned that she had put so much importance on volunteer activities that she preferred to remain a non-regular worker and continue to participate in such activities. For her, being able to continue to participate in such volunteer activities came to justify her work status. Furthermore, participation in volunteer activities while not working full time can be negatively viewed by others. In fact, some participants—Alex, Dorothy, Emily, and Fred—mentioned that their families and others viewed their participation in volunteer activities as detrimental to their engagement in work, job seeking, or doing things for their families.

Furthermore, engagement in volunteer activities is not a perfect method for recovery for all non-regular workers and people who have negative identities. In the first place, the person must be active enough to be involved. Participants in this study had negative identities but were sufficiently active as to be involved in volunteer groups.

6. Conclusion

As aforementioned, all of the participants were unmarried and most lived with their parents. This may have enabled them to become involved in volunteer activities while working part-time. Further, they felt that they were negatively viewed by others in society and have negative identities resulting from their work and career, mental problems, and/or lack of communication and relationships with others. However, participation in volunteer activities enabled them to ease some aspects of their negative identities: such participation gave them opportunities to forge relationships with others and to be of help to people.

Although volunteering has positive effects, it also has certain limitations. First, relationships forged through volunteering may not be long lasting. Most of the participants mentioned that they had had difficulties in balancing their participation with other aspects of their lives; hence, it is questionable whether all of them could continue to participate in the future. Halting participation could see the relationships they have forged weaken or even end. Second, as a result of satisfaction from volunteer activities, non-regular workers who volunteer could be encouraged to remain non-regular workers in order to maintain their lifestyles. Engagement may also open them up to criticism for not working full time. Third, participation in volunteer activities requires being active enough to be involved in the first place. Thus, it is not a perfect solution for all non-regular workers and people who have negative identities.

A previous study indicated that participation in a labor union can enable people who are highly motivated, have sufficient information and knowledge regarding labor, and come from relatively advanced academic backgrounds to recover from negative identities. This study found that participation in volunteer activities can be considered a method to enable non-regular workers who have lower levels of motivation, do not come from advanced academic backgrounds, or have mental problems to re-

cover from negative identities. In addition, participation in volunteer activities forces people to go outside of themselves: they can provide volunteers with the opportunity to forge new relationships with people. This is crucial for non-regular workers, who have difficulties in relationships with people and in feeling connected to society.

This study has certain limitations that must be considered in future studies. First, this study had a small number of participants; moreover, the number of participants in their 30s and 40s was lacking compared to the number of participants in their 20s. In addition, not only qualitative but also quantitative research is necessary to support the findings.

Notes

(1) Paugam's research deals with unemployed people who have lost regular jobs and have continually faced the instability involved in working non-regular jobs.

(2) Other social welfare organizations are either limited to specific areas or require special skills; such organizations are mainly composed of older people, including housewives.

(3) These names are fictitious and were chosen to maintain the participants' privacy.

(4) Regarding confidence in their own "health and physical strength," 23.8%, 32.2%, and 31.2% of regular workers, part-time workers, and contract workers, respectively, indicated that they were either "not confident" or "not very confident."

(5) Participants engaged in non-regular work such as in product inspection or at fast food restaurants apparently found it harder to feel their roles were important compared with participants who worked in computer classes, at a nursery, or in a hospital. However, Chris, who worked at a transportation company sorting loads, mentioned only that he had difficulties in relationships at work with other employees; he did not mention that he had difficulties in regard to whether he felt that he was playing an important role in society. George, who now works at a restaurant, did not mention difficulties in regard to whether he felt he was playing an important role. However, crucially, George had had work experience at a nursery; he placed considerable emphasis on this and had thought of eventually becoming a nursery teacher.

(6) Chris does not come from a poor academic background: he graduated from college and dropped out of graduate school. However, it mattered to him that he was not able to attend the university that he wanted to attend.

(7) This was because of the nature of his work: in product inspection, only one person at a time can take breaks.

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