



# Generosity in Times of Crisis

South Korean Helping Behaviors  
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

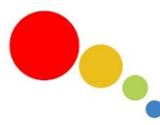
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# Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary .....	4
2. Introduction: COVID-19 and Public Generosity .....	5
3. Research Method .....	6
3.1 Participants and Procedure .....	6
3.2 Timing and COVID-19 Context .....	6
4. Global Comparison .....	7
5. National Findings .....	8
5.1 Generosity During COVID-19 .....	8
5.2 Changes in Generosity .....	12
5.3 Case Study .....	13
6. Conclusion .....	14
6.1 Key Findings .....	14
6.2 Implications for Nonprofits .....	15
6.3 Implications for Government Policy .....	15
7. References .....	17
8. Appendix .....	18
8.1 Notes .....	18
8.2 Additional Information About Sample .....	18
8.3 Additional Findings .....	18

# 1. Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into a health crisis that has had devastating effects on the global economy and public life in many countries. Little is known about how people have responded to two competing pressures caused by the crisis in many countries: increased community need coupled with the decreased financial capacity to help others. We surveyed 2,006 people on 12- 21 August 2020 to understand how their generosity behaviors manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are defining generosity as all forms of behavior that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).

Four key findings from the South Korean study emerged:

1. Overall, generosity behaviors continued and were enhanced during the times of crisis in South Korea. More than three-quarters of donors who donated to a charity in South Korea were willing to maintain philanthropic donations; slightly less than half of the people who had not previously donated to a charity showed a desire to help others during COVID-19.
2. South Koreans reported a higher rate of informal giving than other countries in this study. South Koreans were more likely to donate goods rather than cash donations, with the US being the only country ranking higher.
3. New trends of generosity behaviors emerged such as a strong likelihood to help a stranger, and a higher likelihood that young people would participate in philanthropic giving rather than the older people in South Korea.
4. The South Korean study highlighted that diverse giving venues (e.g. online giving, crowdfunding, etc.) are significant for stimulating generosity behavior during times of crisis.

**Managerial Implications.** Nonprofits may wish to:

- Initiate efforts to raise philanthropic giving, even in crisis conditions because generally, people are willing to engage in generosity behaviors, either new or continuing.
- Increase agility during a crisis by using new strategies to engage potential donors, for example, using online platforms for fundraising.

**Policy Implications.** Governments may wish to:

- Enhance cross-sector collaboration to address the crisis. Civil society's role and contribution became more central and significant during the pandemic including working with the government on COVID-19 quarantine and prevention measures.
- Focus on strategic communication with the public and civil society about the crisis to foster trust, transparency and openness.

## 2. Introduction: COVID-19 and Public Generosity

In early 2020, the world was thrown into a health crisis that had devastating effects on the global economy and social life in many countries: the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (September 2021), more than 225 million people have contracted the virus globally and over 4.6 million people have died (Worldometer, 2021). By April 2020, more than 3.9 billion people from 90 countries – around half the world’s population – were told by their governments to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus (Sandford, 2020). These restrictions had knock-on effects for people’s social lives, as many people were separated from friends and family for long periods of time. Restricted movement (and associated dampened spending) also devastated many economies, with more than 225 million full-time jobs being lost from the global economy and unemployment rates skyrocketing in many countries (Hassan, 2021). In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis that has severely impacted social and economic life in many countries.

The pandemic has had two competing effects in relation to the provision of social support to communities in need. On the one hand, the crisis amplified need: many more families than usual found themselves in need of support due to sickness or unemployment, especially families from vulnerable communities. On the other hand, because the global economy was straining and many families were facing difficult times, nonprofits and social programs faced reduced flows of income and support (CAF, 2021). Yet little is known about how people responded to these twin pressures: did the pressures of the pandemic constrain generosity, or were people able to find ways to help each other regardless? The purpose of this report is to answer this overarching question:

*How have generosity behaviors manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

We define generosity as all forms of behavior that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).<sup>1</sup> Generosity behaviors therefore include both formal and informal support. Examples of formal generosity behaviors are donating money to charities, volunteering for nonprofit organizations, or giving blood. Informal generosity behaviors include helping people they know, helping strangers, and participating in grassroots community groups.

To answer our research question, we formed a team of researchers working in eleven countries to collect data on the formal and informal generosity practices that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries included in the research project were Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States.

Country reports will be available online at: [www.globalgenerosityresearch.com](http://www.globalgenerosityresearch.com). This series is part of a broader research initiative from “The Global Generosity Project” led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in the United States.

In this report, we focus on the South Korea context and compare high-level findings to those from another nine countries where scholars also collected the same data about generosity during the pandemic: Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.

By understanding generosity responses to this particular crisis, we can learn more about how individuals and societies respond to crises in general. Such knowledge can be used to develop policies and practices that ensure that South Korea will be able to withstand future shocks while maintaining a thriving and harmonious social fabric. To this end, we include a summary of our key findings and recommendations for both nonprofits and government.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in eleven countries during the second half of 2020 and early 2021, with at least 644 participants per country (range 644 – 5900). In many countries, efforts were made to generate a nationally representative sample of participants.

Philanthropic giving during COVID-19 in South Korea was conducted as part of the 2020 Giving Korea annual survey initiated by the Beautiful Foundation in South Korea. The data were collected via an online survey conducted between August 12- 21, 2020. The participants in this survey were randomly selected using stratified random sampling (based on gender, age, and location). As a result, a total of 2,006 adults aged 19 or older participated in this survey. The sample consisted of 50.3% of female (1,010), 49.7% male (996); 48% indicated to be religiously affiliated, the range of age for the participants was from 19 to 85 years ( $M = 46.8$ ,  $SD = 15.0$ ), 30.1% were single, 61.8% were married, and 8.1% were either widowed or divorced. More information on the participant demographics can be found in the Appendix.

### 3.2 Timing and COVID-19 Context

On January 20, 2020, the first confirmed COVID-19 case in South Korea was reported, and the number of confirmed cases abruptly increased from a rate of 20 per day to more than 200 new cases per day during the next three weeks (Jeong & Kim, 2021). After the confirmed case there was a steep spike, and South Korea became the second most infected country after China by early March (Shim et al., 2020). At the time of data collection for this study, August 2020, South Korea reached the peak of the second wave with a total of 17,945 confirmed cases and 310 deaths (World Health Organization, n.d.).

The South Korean government immediately took action based on the 3-T policy, known as “Triple T” (test, trace, and treat), to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections (Jeong & Kim, 2021; Yilmaz & Aydin, 2020). The Triple T policy involved the following actions: 1) rapid and agile screening tests with innovative test ideas (e.g. Drive-Through and Walk-Through testing station) as the foremost step to identify the positive cases of COVID-19; 2) unlimited tracing of contacts of infected people to find those who have met or come in contact with the COVID-19 positive cases; and 3) providing proper treatment for their recovery without any delay (Cho et al., 2020; Jeong & Kim, 2020).

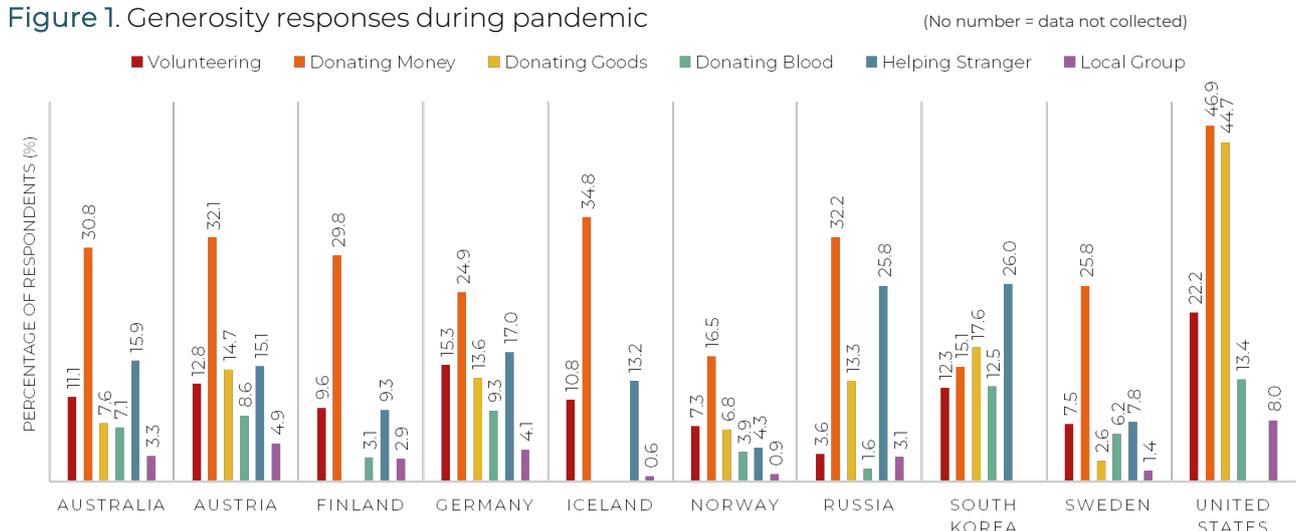
Although the FDA highlighted that different approaches might work for different countries (FDA, n.d.), the Triple-T approach was successfully implemented to curtail the epidemic in South Korea. As a result, South Korea’s response to COVID-19 earned global attention and became one of the most effective models against COVID-19 (Lee et al., 2020; Moon, 2020; UN News, 2020). To illustrate, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom, declared that the South Korean case shows the virus can be contained and that countries should be aware of the lessons from South Korea (Fisher & Choe, 2020).

In addition, Jeong and Kim (2020) highlight that the South Korean model against COVID-19 was successful not only because of the Triple T approach by the South Korean government but also due to relentless coordination with multiple actors of society, including individuals, civil society, and transformational governmental leadership. The FDA (n.d.) stressed that the South Korean model successfully flattened the spread of COVID-19 along with an advanced technology system, mask-wearing, social distancing, selective, temporary business closures, and government’s effective communication strategy.

## 4. Global Comparison

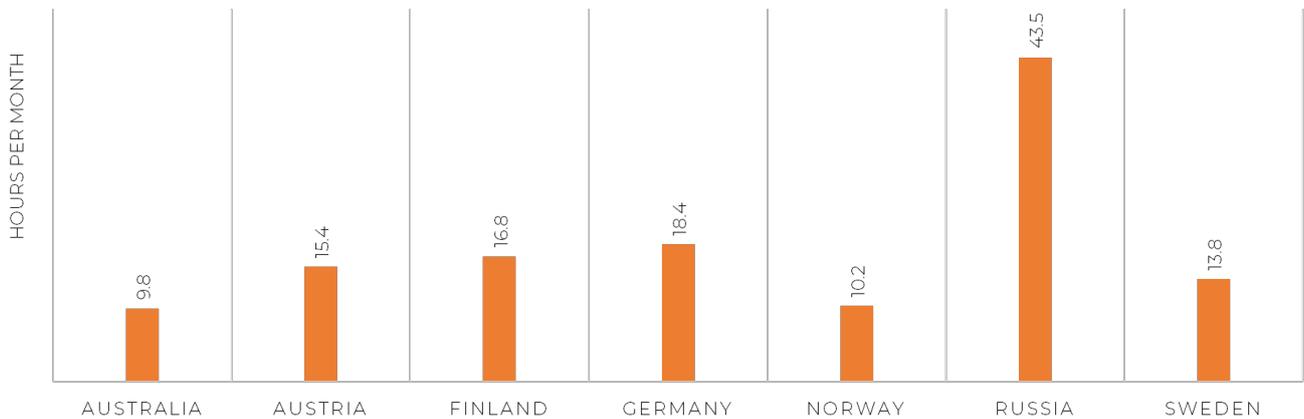
As seen in Figure 1, manifestations of generosity behaviors varied across national contexts. We asked participants which generosity behaviors they had engaged in since the beginning of the pandemic. Some countries did not ask about all behaviors. In most countries, donating money was the most common generosity behavior reported. South Koreans showed unique patterns of generosity behavior during the COVID-19 outbreak. South Koreans had more engaged in in-kind (donation of goods) donations than cash donations at the beginning of the pandemic because South Koreans faced a shortage of personal protective equipment (e.g., face masks, sanitizers, etc.) and charity goods for the infected quarantined people. The lack of necessary goods to fight against COVID-19 might have motivated people to donate goods related to COVID protection, rather than a cash donation. South Korean data showed a higher rate of volunteering, a higher rate of helping strangers, and a higher rate of donating blood during the pandemic than usual. The causes of the differences could be deducted from South Korean philanthropic culture during the times of crisis. According to Roh (2020), South Koreans tend to participate in generosity behaviors more frequently during times of crisis, such as for the economic crisis in 2007, the Sewol Ferry disaster in 2014, and the wildfire in 2019 in South Korea.

Figure 1. Generosity responses during pandemic



The extent of generosity behaviors varied significantly across nations. Respondents in different countries showed large differences in terms of the number of hours they volunteered each month<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2). Unfortunately, there were no data on the number of hours spent on volunteering in South Korea. Of the hours volunteered per month (Figure 2), Russia stands out with 43.5 hours, about 2.5 times more hours than volunteers in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Germany. Yet Russia also had the lowest percentage of volunteers during the pandemic (Figure 1: 3.6%), compared with 22.2% of Americans, 15.3% of Germans and 12.8% Austrians.

**Figure 2.** Average number of hours per month spent volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic



## 5. National Findings

The key purpose of this report is to examine how South Koreans responded to the COVID-19 crisis; in particular, how individuals came together to help support those directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. Below we consider the different forms of generosity behavior that were common in South Korea during the pandemic and how these generosity behaviors changed during the pandemic. We then discuss a particular example of how generosity manifested in South Korea during the crisis.

### 5.1 Generosity During COVID-19

At the time of data collection, South Korea had faced second wave of COVID-19 outbreak (the first wave in January – April; the second wave in August). This survey was conducted to understand generosity behaviors in South Korea while the country was facing it's second COVID-19 outbreak. Figure 3 illustrates the philanthropic behaviors during COVID-19 in South Korea. 15.1% of people in South Korea participated in formal giving (cash donation) for COVID-19, which is comparatively lower than the average donor rate in previous years (average giving rate in South Korea: 49.5%), according to the Beautiful Foundation (2020). Around 17.7% of the respondents donated in-kind during COVID-19.

In this survey, in-kind donation was slightly higher than cash donations in South Korea (17.7% for in-kind vs. 15.1% for cash) due to the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) at the beginning of the pandemic in South Korea (the Beautiful Foundation, 2020).

At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in South Korea, South Korea faced a lack of PPE items, and public and private organizations drove various donation campaigns for the goods. Most of the in-kind donations were made in March and April 2020, shortly after the first wave hit in South Korea.

Blood donation in South Korea is unique generosity behavior under the times of crisis. As shown in Figure 3, the participants in this survey showed a higher level of blood donation in South Korea (12.5%, the second-highest blood donation rate in this study) compared with the annual blood donation rate in the previous year (8.2%) (The Korean Red Cross, 2019). In South Korea, blood donation was started in 1957 by the Korean Red Cross (KRC) and supported by the governmental trust to KRC in 1981. Since then, blood donation has been nationally and systemically encouraged. Particularly, blood donation during the national crisis time has increased in South Korea because the Korean government and mass media vigorously encouraged blood donation during the crisis. For example, we found more than 100 news articles to promote blood donation between January 2020 and August 2020. According to NEWS1(2021, March 26), the group blood donations rate in high schools and colleges tripled during this time, compared with the previous record. Also, the blood donation rate may have been higher than other countries in this study because South Korea has not had a national or partial lockdown due to COVID-19, so generosity behavior requesting in-person contact like a blood donation was able to sustain in South Korea during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Figure 3 also shows that 26.0% of South Koreans did donate to help a stranger during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, South Korea was not a country that showed a higher proportion of people engaging in helping a stranger. According to CAF (2019), an average of 43% of South Koreans has helped a stranger between 2010 and 2019, which is a low percentage compared to other countries globally. However, we found that in times of crisis, more people in South Korea participated in helping a stranger during COVID-19 compared to other countries in this study. The reason for this is likely due to Koreans' philanthropy culture during times of crisis. South Korea has a long history of helping and organizing national donation campaigns during times of crisis in South Korea. For example, the National Debt Compensation Movement in 1907 was the first national campaign for donations to maintain the independence of South Korea from Japan. During the South Korean economic crisis in 1997, tens of thousands of South Koreans voluntarily participated in the gold collection campaign to sell or donate to help the country out of its crisis (Kim & Finch, 2002). During the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Korean government and mass media delivered a series of messages asking for donations to help health care providers, volunteers, and the COVID-19 patients. As a result, charitable donations to help strangers were strongly encouraged across the nation.

Figure 3. South Korean generosity behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic

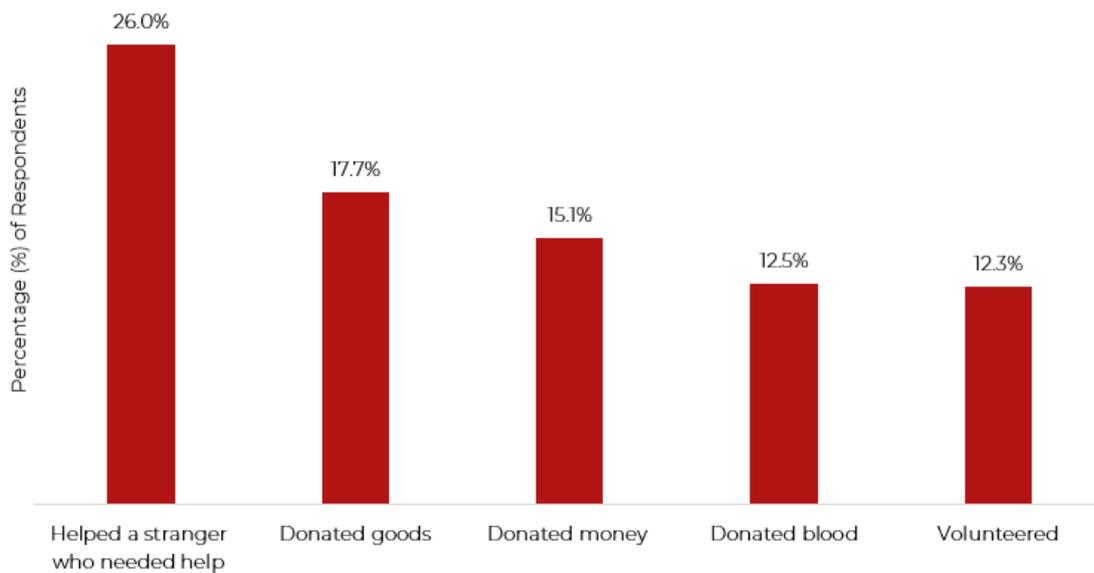
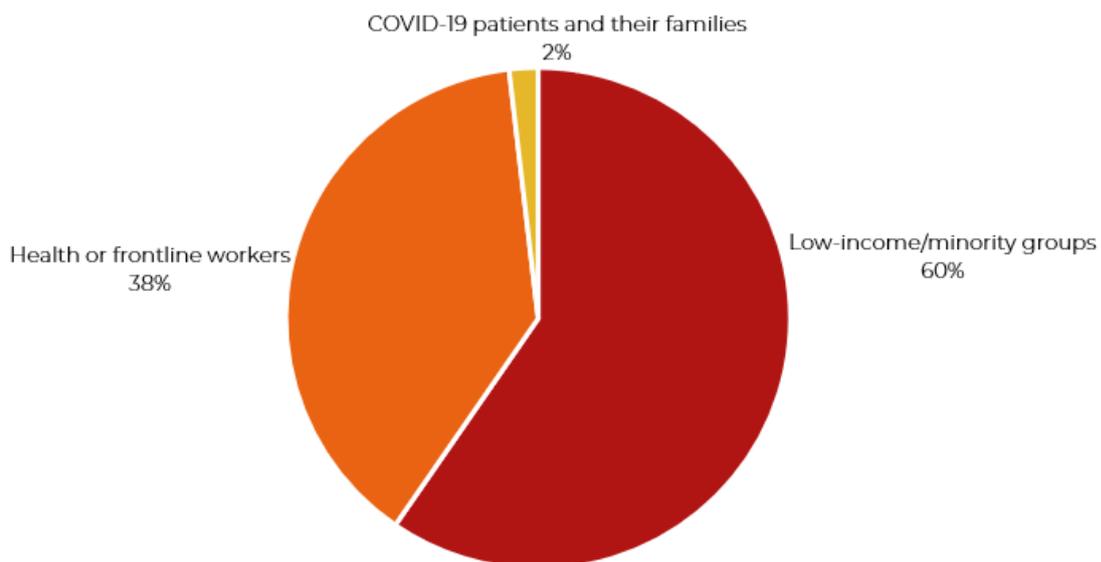


Figure 4. indicates the purpose of giving during COVID-19. More than half of people donated to help low-income families or minority groups who could not access public aid (58.1%), and 37.6% of donors gave help to frontline workers such as health care providers, medical providers, and volunteers.

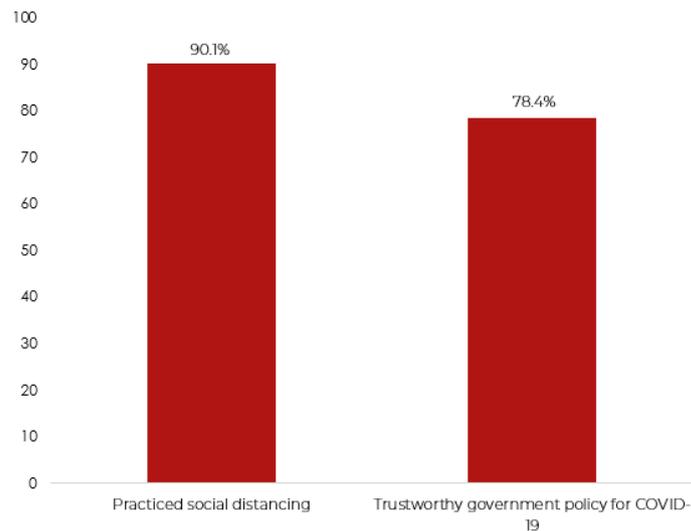
Figure 4. South Korean generosity behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic



Only a few people donated to help the COVID-19 patients/quarantined people or their families, not because they did not need help, but because of the unique circumstances regarding COVID-19, such as the infection path during the first and second wave in South Korea. In general, people in South Korea tend to believe the government should provide medical and financial services to patients rather than charities.

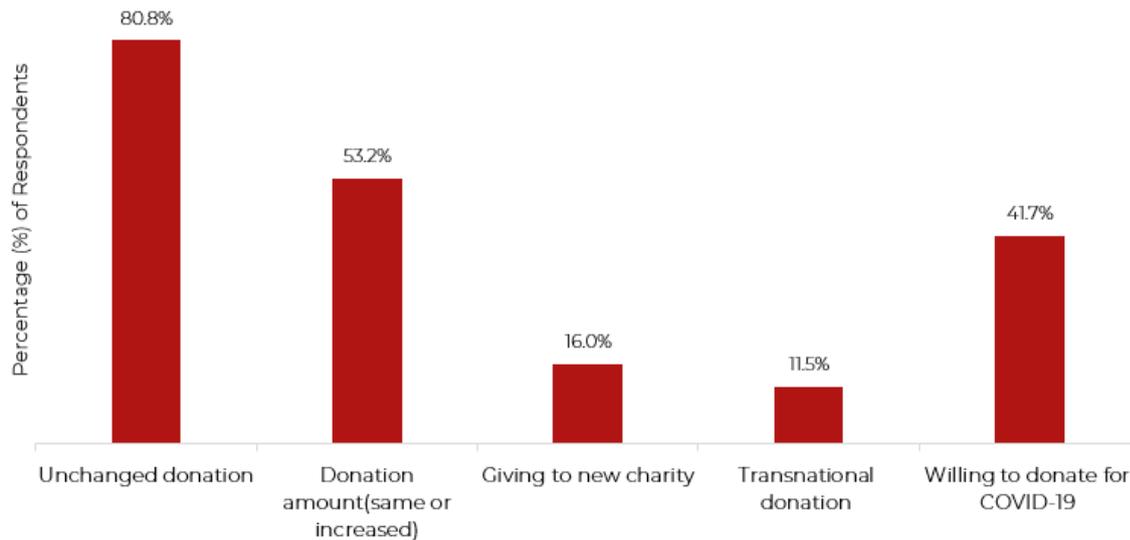
Furthermore, the negative perception of COVID-19 patients might impact the giving of support to the infected population and their families (the Beautiful Foundation, 2020). After the first confirmed case was reported in South Korea, a religious gathering and series of religious-related events led to an explosive outbreak in South Korea (Jeong & Kim, 2020). These infection paths might have reduced motivation to give to COVID-19 patients and their families (the Beautiful Foundation, 2020).

**Figure 5.** Efforts to overcome COVID-19



In addition, Figure 5 shows that 90% of all respondents said they practiced social distancing, and 78.4% of the respondents showed that they trust the government policy and approaches to curtail the spread of COVID-19.

Figure 6 shows attitudes toward generosity behaviors under COVID-19 in South Korea. Although COVID-19 continuously spreading in South Korea, it appears that many people were willing to donate in the future because 41.7% of all respondents in this study were willing to make a donation to organizations relating to COVID-19. Prior studies (Roh, 2020; the Beautiful Foundation, 2019) reported that South Korean donors showed greater willingness to sustain philanthropic giving under a natural/national disaster, according to prior studies; the same findings have emerged under the times of the COVID-19 crisis. Around 81% of donors were willing to maintain their donations that they had made to charities prior COVID-19, and 53.2% of donors sustained the same amount of giving or even increased their donations that they used to give before COVID-19 (approximately 10% of donors increased the amount of giving during this time span in South Korea). In addition, 16% of all participants donated to a new charity, and 11.5% of them gave to charities in other countries.

**Figure 6.** Attitudes toward philanthropic giving under the COVID-19 outbreak

## 5.2 Changes in Generosity

The changes in generosity during the pandemic compared to the pre-COVID era in South Korea were conducted based on the findings from the Giving Korea 2020 study (the Beautiful Foundation 2020). Giving Korea, initiated by the Beautiful Foundation, is the longest and oldest empirical database on philanthropic giving in South Korea (Wiepking & Handy, 2018). As shown in Table 1, fewer people participated in generosity during the COVID-19 pandemic than had done so during the 2019 calendar year. However, the variation is due to the time difference between the Giving Korea 2020 and this survey. The measurement period in the Giving Korea 2020 was the entire year of 2019, whereas the generosity behaviors in this study were measured only a half of the year (January 2020- July 2020). More detailed comparisons will be estimated in the following biannual report of Giving Korea 2022.

**Table 1.** Comparison of generosity before and during the pandemic (frequency & logistic regression for likelihood of making monetary donations)

	During 2019	During Pandemic
Donated	46.5%	15.1%
Volunteered	29.2%	12.3%
Donating money		
Age	1.000(0.03)	0.986(0.05)***
Income	1.001(0.00)***	1.000(0.000)
Education level	0.588(0.099)***	0.570(0.135)***

Note: \*\*\* p<0.001

[Source] The Beautiful Foundation (2020) Giving Korea 2020<sup>5</sup>

When considering differences between people in making donations, the study from the Beautiful Foundation (2020) showed that younger people (30s- 40s) are more likely to donate to charity during the pandemic, while there was no age difference in charitable giving pre-pandemic (p< 0.001).

In general, older people (65+) donated to charity more than younger people in South Korea. A likely explanation is that younger people are more likely to be associated with modern giving venues (e.g. crowdfunding and online donation) rather than traditional venues (e.g. face-to-face donation) during the pandemic. Under the COVID-19 outbreak, the higher risk of being hospitalized or dying from the virus poses a greater threat to older people, who might otherwise be willing to donate using traditional charity platforms in South Korea. Additionally, more highly educated people were more likely to participate in donations both before and during the pandemic. Income level was not statistically significant in determining who gave a donation to charity during the pandemic, whereas, pre-pandemic, those with higher levels of income were more likely to donate money.

### 5.3 Case Study

During the COVID-19 outbreak, South Korea has faced unprecedented challenges; both to contain the virus, and cope with its impacts. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in South Korea, especially grant-making organizations, have led and coordinated special fundraising campaigns to support the country to respond to the pandemic. Historical numbers of people in South Korea have made a donation support COVID-19 relief during the last year, according to Community Chest of Korea (2021).

Three major nonprofits, including Community Chest of Korea (CCK), the Korea Disaster Relief Association (KDRA), and the Korean Red Cross (KRC), were authorized by the government to organize a fundraising campaign for COVID-19 response during last year (pictured below). CCK launched the special fundraising campaign for COVID-19 from February 24, 2020, to April 30, 2020, and raised approximately 95 million USD (KRW 108M) (CCK, n.d). A total of 185,181 people participated in the donation campaign, which was the largest number of people donating to a single fundraising campaign in CCK's past twenty years of fundraising history. Around half of the donations (50.2%) received through the fundraising went toward activities to prevent the COVID-19 spread. Almost 27% of the gifts were distributed to support underprivileged people such as supporting living expenses for families in crisis and meals for the homeless. 13.8% were delivered to support medical staff, volunteers, and confirmed patients. The rest of the donations went to help people in need (Part et al., 2021).



Image: COVID-19 Special fundraising (Community Chest of Korea, n.d.)

As of December 2020, the KDRA raised 80 million USD (KRW 98M) for COVID-19 relief (KDRA, n.d.) and the KRC received 78 million USD (KRW 91M) in donations from the COVID-19 response campaign as of July 2020 (KRC, 2020). The KDRA and the KRC primarily focused on providing necessary goods, such as quarantine relief kits and food kits etc. Also, both of the charities engaged in provision of personal protective equipment, such as masks, hand sanitizers, medical gloves, and other protective gear.

## 6. Conclusion

In this section, we briefly summarize the findings of South Koreans' generosity behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic and elaborate on potential implications both for government policy and nonprofit management.

### 6.1 Key Findings

There are five key findings from this report. Overall generosity in South Korea during the COVID-19 outbreak has been enhanced in diverse ways. First, charitable goods were immediately given to people in need from the beginning of the pandemic in South Korea. Second, blood donation was exponentially higher due to the unique philanthropy culture in South Korea. Third, the behavior of helping a stranger was undertaken by the people in South Korea more than usual due to the philanthropic culture in times of crisis. People in South Korea are much more likely to make donations in times of crisis. Fourth, despite the economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic, generosity manifested, and was even enhanced in certain aspects, in South Korea.

People who had not participated in giving before did give during the pandemic, and new charities were explored for donation. Lastly, in contrast to a general pattern of giving, younger people were more likely to give to charity during COVID-19 than prior to COVID-19 due to the disruption of traditional ways of donating (e.g. in-person fundraising and face-to-face donation). This implies that diversifying giving venues is imperative to reinforcing generosity behavior for the younger generations.

## 6.2 Implications for Nonprofits

Results suggest that generosity is enforced in innovative and diverse ways, even during times of crisis. Traditional giving behaviors and vehicles might not be applicable under this type of crisis in South Korea. This is where the nonprofit sector steps in during times of crisis:

During times of crisis the nonprofit sector can:

- Initiate fundraising for philanthropic giving to charity, even during crisis. The results in this study indicate that people in general remain and/or are newly willing to engage in generosity behaviors, even during times of crisis, so nonprofits should devote their resources to stimulating philanthropic generosity.
- Employ new strategies for fundraising such as promoting online giving, targeting the younger generations, and recruiting new donors. The South Korean case study suggested that prior empirical knowledge to understanding generosity behaviors might not be applicable for predicting generosity behaviors in South Korea during times of crisis (e.g. a higher likelihood to help a stranger, higher giving rate in younger people, etc.).
- Facilitate in-kind donations rather than formal giving during the times of crisis. The results in the South Korean study address that in-kind giving were slightly higher than cash giving under the COVID-19.

## 6.3 Implications for Government Policy

Results suggest that government actions against the COVID-19 outbreak should involve cooperation and partnerships with multiple actors in society. Without partnerships with citizens and civil society that encourage voluntary generosity behaviors to curtail the COVID-19 outbreak, the central and local level governmental efforts could be futile. The results in this study suggested that the South Korean model was successful against COVID-19 because the South Korean government maximized opportunities and opened channels for civil society to contribute its resources and philanthropic inputs in response to the virus.

During times of crisis, governments can:

- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration to curtail the COVID-19 outbreak. Civil society and individuals were willing to participate in philanthropic behaviors and willing to sacrifice privacy for surveillance. Beyond working with the government on COVID-19 quarantine and prevention measures, civil society's roles and contributions became more central and significant during the pandemic.

- Obtain public buy-in and trust through transparency and openness. Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, the South Korean government provided the public with updated data on the virus and clear guidelines on how to avoid infection. In this regard, more than three-quarters of respondents in this study show they trust the governmental response against COVID-19 and successfully enhance actions being taken to mitigate the threats.

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# 8. Appendix

## 8.1 Notes

1. A full overview of generosity behaviors can be found on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/mznqu/>).
2. Due to unusual outliers, the data has been winsorized for two countries at the 99th (Australia) or 95th (Russia) percentile.
3. A full the *Giving Korea 2020* report (in Korean) can be found on the following link (<https://research.beautifulfund.org/blog/2020/12/02/%EA%B8%B0%EB%B9%99%EC%BD%94%EB%A6%AC%EC%95%842020-%EB%8B%A4%EC%8B%9C%EB%B3%B4%EA%B8%B0/>).

## 8.2 Additional Information About Sample

- Educational level: 47.5% of the respondents in South Korean study had a high school diploma, followed by a college degree (40.4%), graduate degree (8.9%), and middle-school degree (3.1%).
- 82.8% of the respondents had experience in philanthropic giving prior to COVID-19.
- The majority of philanthropic giving was made in March or April 2020, which was shortly after the first wave hit in South Korea (33.7% in March and 34.7% in April)

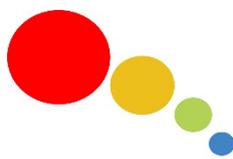
## 8.3 Additional Findings

- 0.6% of the respondents who have not had charitable giving experience participated in generosity during COVID-19
- 14.0% of the continued donors participated in giving during COVID-19.
- 12.0% of the continued donors gave their donations to a new charity during COVID-19.
- As similar as prior study, social responsibility and trustworthiness to the charity were statistically significant motivational factors for charitable giving in South Korea ( $p < 0.05$  or higher).



## The Beautiful Foundation

The Center on Philanthropy at The Beautiful Foundation is the first private research hub in South Korea that thoroughly dedicates the study of South Korean philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in South Korea. For more information, visit <https://research.beautifulfund.org/whowear-e-en/>.



## Global Generosity Research