

Depicting young people by what they are not: conceptualisation and usage of NEET as a deficit label.

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Abstract

Over the last decade particularly in the UK, the term NEET (not in education, employment or training) has been used excessively by the New Labour Government to deal with concerns of social and economic exclusion among the youth. This paper explores issues relating to the usage of NEET as a service intervention label and its compatibility with the group of young people to whom it refers. The process involves review of relevant literature on existing research into NEET with the view to assessing its usefulness as a descriptive label. It is argued that because NEET covers a wide range of circumstances that young people are in, its use as a policy target is problematic. Similarly, it is contended that the use of NEET as a key point of focus for targeting service interventions amounts to fire-fighting tantamount to the concentration of attention on those victims who can relatively be moved easily to EET (education, employment or training) destinations at the expense of others who could benefit from such attention but do not receive it. The paper concludes that since poor experience of education is only one factor of NEETness, a multi-agency approach (rather than an individualized approach) is needed to tackle it.

Keywords: *education; employment; training; unemployment; social exclusion; multi-agency approach*

Introduction

The last decade in Europe has witnessed a growing interest in forms of public policy directed purposefully towards young people (Kahan-Strawczynski, 2003; Maguire and Rennison, 2005; Yates and Payne, 2006; Vanttaja and Jarvinen, 2006). While a variety of reasons have been put forward to explain this emphasis, the central foci of these policies appear to be around the issues of social and economic exclusion¹ (Conrad, 2005; Yates and Payne, 2006). That is, the fear that excluded youth or those at-risk of being excluded socially may not become productive, contributing members of society. In the UK for instance, these social and economic concerns, together with the fear that a poorly educated population unable to make informed choices is a threat to democracy have led particular policy concerns to be directed to those young people who leave, or who are about to leave full-time education at the minimum age of 16 and then spend, or are liable to spend a substantial period not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Although there is a significant blurring surrounding the composition and/or definition of NEET status (with a school of thought defining it as ‘a minimum of 6 months or more during the ages 16 and 18 outside education, employment or training as opposed to being in one or more of them over the same period’—Istance et al., 1994; Williamson, 1997; Bynner and Parsons, 2002), the NEET group is generally defined as 16–19 year olds not in education, employment or training (Social Exclusion Unit—SEU, 1999; Scottish Executive, 2005). Despite recent efforts to expand the number of young people in full-time education and work-based learning in the UK for example, the percentage of 16 year olds who are perceived as NEET in England has remained virtually unchanged since 1998, while the proportion has grown among 17 year olds and has declined among 18 year olds (Maguire and Rennison, 2005). For the past ten years in Scotland, the proportion of young people aged 16 to 19 who are NEET is reported to have remained at about 13.5%, (that is about 35,000 of the age group), while it is estimated that 20,000 of this percentage are likely to require further support² (Scottish Executive, 2005; 2006).

As a result of the upsurge in numbers of the NEET group, a major report from the UK Government’s Social Exclusion Unit was devoted exclusively to the problems of this group. In England, a new policy of counseling and support for these young people: ‘ConneXions’: was formulated to help them achieve successful transition to adulthood (SEU, 1999). In Scotland, a similar policy initiative, ‘The More Choices, More Chances’ was set up and tasked with outlining strategies to reduce the size of the NEET group. The initiative is said to be part of the ‘Closing the Opportunity Gap’ context that brings together Scottish Executive’s (now Scottish Government) targets on worklessness, health inequalities, rurality, financial exclusion, community regeneration, low attainment in school and NEET, including an improvement for care leavers (Scottish Executive, 2005; 2006). On the whole, the NEET challenge in the UK context is part of the Government’s response to targets related to increasing engagement in labour market and eradicating child poverty (SEU, 1999).

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that disadvantage, educational disaffection and low educational achievement are the major risk factors that lead young people to NEET (Scottish Executive, 2006; Yates and Payne, 2006). On the other hand, the subsequent consequences of NEETness include patchy employment prospects, difficult relationships, lack of social and political participation, poor physical and mental health, drug abuse and criminality (Robins and Rutter, 1990; Atkinson and Hills, 1997; Pearce and Hillman, 1998; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Cole et al., 2002; Maguire and Rennison, 2006). In fact, the lifetime cost of the factors that are associated with NEET has been estimated at £7 billion in resource costs, and £8.1 billion in public finance costs at 2000/01 prices (Godfrey et al., 2002, cited by Maguire and Rennison, 2006: 188).

These concerns, particularly the high cost of moving young people from NEET to EET (education, employment and training), apparently offer a legitimate justification for the use of NEET as a label for service intervention purposes. However, as aptly pointed out by Bynner and Parsons (2002: 291), two very important questions arise about these young people. First, what characterizes those who enter NEET? Are they the group who simply fail to do well at school and therefore drop out of all organized activity at the first opportunity, or are there other things that are distinctive about them which put them on an even weaker

opportunity route? Second, is the NEET experience not more than a temporary staging post on a life course marred by disadvantage and failure, or does the experience in itself constitutes a disabling condition or 'identity capital' deficit in its own right, making subsequent adjustment to the demands of adult life significantly more difficult? Obviously, this second stronger view of NEET precludes that failure to gain education or the critical work experience and job training is permanently damaging not only with respect to employment, but also in making satisfactory adjustment to adult life (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Conrad, 2005; Yates and Payne, 2006).

These economic and social concerns thus beg a third, fundamental question about what we do know about the group of young people referred to as NEET and whether for intervention purposes the label is applicable and/or compatible with the group to whom it refers. As Bynner and Parsons (2002: 291) rightly point out, identifying a problematic transition is not the same as having an operational definition which takes account of the origin, attributes, experiences and the consequences for subsequent adult statuses.

This contribution, a timely response to the third of these questions therefore, seeks to assess the conceptualisation and usage of NEET as a descriptive label and its resultant effects on the group of young people to whom it refers. For the purpose of drawing conceptual leverage on its use as a key focus for targeting service interventions, and on the range of circumstances and experiences of the group of young people in the NEET category, the paper explores literature on existing research into NEET along the lines of four themes. These include: the discourse of NEET group and sub-groups; the characteristic features of 'NEETness'; usage of the term NEET and its applicability and/or compatibility with those it refers to; and the perceptions and experiences of young people labeled NEET.

The discourse of NEET group and sub-groups

The analysis of relevant research literature indicates that the group of young people labeled as NEET is not a homogeneous group. A number of different sub-groups can be identified within the NEET group. These sub-groups consist of:

- Care leavers
- Carers
- Young parents
- Offenders
- Young people with low educational attainment
- Persistent truants
- Young people with physical/mental health problems
- Young people with drugs or alcohol abuse problems.

While this sub-categorization explicated in the literature is useful in terms of the focus it provides for targeting service interventions for the NEET group, it however misses out on a number of other groups which potentially could be subsumed under the general NEET category. Belonging to these missing groups are young people who are full-time home-makers as well as young people who are NEET because of chronic illness. Another of these groups is what conceptually could be referred to as 'positive NEET group'³. This latter group

is made up of those young people who are NEET out of individual choice and opportunity and include those who are on 'gap year' or are into voluntary/charity work and/or are working part-time. The group also includes those young people, particularly girls, who have taken time out of full-time education or employment for procreation purposes⁴. Unlike the former group, the important thing about this latter group of young people is that neither are their behaviour necessarily associated with disadvantaged backgrounds nor are they necessarily at greater risk of future NEET spell. Other un-identified sub-groups which could also be subsumed under the general NEET category include those whose personal circumstances and/or group membership puts them or is likely to put them at risk of becoming disadvantaged as far as education, employment or training is concerned. Membership of this last group includes: refugees/asylum seekers, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, and the homeless.

It however remains to be noted that although the NEET sub-groups are presented as distinct, they are not considered in the literature as mutually exclusive. The literature/research evidence (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Kahan-Strawczynski, 2002; Yates & Payne, 2006) cite instances in which young persons identified as NEET exhibited or were at risk of exhibiting more than one characteristic features of NEETness from the other sub-groups. A case in point worth illuminating here is an out of school pregnant teenager and drug addict living with and caring for her siblings in a deprived area of an inner city. Again, as a result of the nature of the NEET literature and the focus on education, employment and training issues, extensive detail on the sub-groups themselves and the factors which led to them becoming NEET does not appear to have been provided. As such, it is difficult to ascertain clear patterns of risks for the purposes of prioritizing them for the sub-groups.

Characteristic features of the 'NEET' group

Although the 'NEET' literature acknowledges that there is no such thing as 'a one size fits all' attitude to towards risk factors to NEETness, there are however a number of identical themes which appear to be most prevalent. These themes include: deprivation; financial exclusion; low attainment; weak family and other support networks (such as peers); stigma and attitudes of others; and debt-aversity. Of all these themes, young people who are disaffected with schooling in the form of exclusion, truancy or bullying are found to be at an increased risk of becoming NEET (DfES, 2000; Payne, 2000, cited by Maguire & Rennison, 2005).

The preponderance of available research evidence also indicate that whereas NEETness is signified by not being in education, employment or training, 'at-riskness' (that is, those at risk of becoming NEET) is most frequently manifested by poor academic and social skills that promote a general disconnection with the school culture (DfES, 2000; McDonald, 2002; Scottish Executive, 2005). Similarly, participation in education and training appears largely to be related to the family background or what Bynner and Parsons (2002) refer to as 'social and cultural capital' of the young people identified as NEET. Those with at least one parent in full-time employment; with parents in non-manual occupations; and those who live in owner-occupied housing are identified as having a higher likelihood of being in education and training than those not in these categories (DfES, 2000).

Also, evidence abounds in the research literature to support the view that although human capital, as embodied in skills and qualification, serves as a kind of insurance against social exclusion, that in itself may not be sufficient to sustain a 'well fulfilling' adult life. As Bynner and Parsons (2002) aptly point out, in addition to the need for skills and qualifications (human capital), social networks (social capital) and family know-how (cultural capital), a significant premium has to be placed on what they describe as 'identity capital'. By definition, identity capital embraces the three forms of capitals (human, social and cultural) as well as a range of psychological attributes. It is manifested, in its active form, in the personal agency that enables individuals to navigate their way into and through the modern labour market (Evans and Heinz, 1994; Evans and Furlong, 1997, cited by Bynner and Parsons, 2002: 291)⁵.

Conceptualisation and usage and of NEET as a deficit label

A review of the 'NEET' literature shows that the term is relatively recent. It is synonymous with terms previously used to describe the experiences of a section of young people as far as issues of education and employment are concerned. Some of the terms with which NEET is synonymous include: 'Getting Nowhere' (Bynner, et al., 1997); 'Status Zero' (Williamson, 1997); 'High risk category of non-college bound youth' (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997); 'Generation X' (Pearce & Hillman, 1998); 'Off Register' (Bently & Gurumurphy, 1999); 'Wasted Youth', 'Disengaged', 'Disaffected', 'Disappeared Young People' (Holroyd and Armour, 2003; DfES, 2007); 'At-Risk' (Conrad, 2005). Specifically, the term 'NEET' is used collectively to refer to the 16–19 year olds group (although it is acknowledged that NEET status in this group is influenced by experiences of education below the age of 16) who, during the critical period of the late teens, spend or are likely to spend a substantial amount of time outside any form of education, employment or training. As indicated earlier, statistical records indicate that in Scotland there has been a little recent change in the size of the NEET group which currently stands at approximately 13.7% (Scottish Executive, 2005), while in England, the percentage of 16 year olds who are NEET has remained virtually unchanged since 1998, while the proportion has grown among 17 year olds and has declined among 18 year olds (Maguire and Rennison, 2005).

According to the NEET literature, the issues of active engagement in labour market and the means to entering it through education or training, coupled with the urgent need for young people to make successful transitions to adulthood (Bynner and Parsons, 2001) are the key components of governments' approach to policy concerning these young people. This concern is for instance, expressed explicitly in an introduction to a Social Exclusion Report by the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He notes:

The best defense against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience. (SEU, 1999)

These concerns thus provide a testimony of the issues that have necessitated the commitment of governments all over Europe to confronting and addressing the needs of young people labeled as NEET. However, a critical examination of the term from both the literature and research evidence suggests that its usage carries with it some excess

baggage. The term for instance, defines young people by what they are not, and subsumes under a negatively-perceived label (Yates and Payne, 2006). In the illustrations that follow the term NEET is analysed in terms of the conceptual and practical problems and limitations that emerge with its use, and the negative connotations and assumed links to social exclusion that go with it.

Conceptual problems

This relates to the problems with the use of NEET as a label for describing a portion of young people and the ways in which it leads them to be conceived. One of the criticisms here rests in the fact that the term assumes or at least endorses the assumption that all young people who are at any given time not in education, working or receiving training could be thought of as a homogeneous group facing similar difficulties and risks, and are susceptible to identical forms of professional help or intervention. This however runs contrary to research evidence (Bynner and Parsons, 2001; Yates and Payne, 2006) which show that, subsumed under the NEET label are often very different group of young people exhibiting very different characteristics, facing very different challenges, risks and transitions, and with a very different potential needs for intervention. For this reason, particularly the lack of precise boundaries for the NEET experience, one would have expected that the term is operationalised in context and defined longitudinally to capture as precisely as possible the attributes of such youth. Ideally, one would have thought that NEET would be defined longitudinally to represent a minimum period of time (6 months or more during the ages of 16–18) outside education, training and employment as opposed to being in one or more of them over the same period. This view is strongly endorsed by Istance et al. 1994; Williamson, 1997; Bynner and Parsons, 2002.

As well as challenging the status of NEET as a kind of universal label, the term, quite apart from suggesting that being NEET is itself the most salient identifier, also presupposes invariably that for a young person to be NEET is automatically a negative or problematic state inherently linked either to social exclusion and/or disadvantage. This assumption which appears to have run through the NEET literature, is however questioned seriously by research illustrations (Yates and Payne, 2006: 234–236) which identify other sub-groups within the NEET group, for example those with temporary parental or caring responsibilities as well as those in transitional states for whom being NEET is necessarily not a negative or problematic situation. For these groups of young people therefore, the conceptual linking of NEET with social exclusion or disadvantages could only act to colour as problematic their transitions which do not present them with any perceived problems.

Also, the usage of NEET as a classification category for young people who are both NEET and facing other significant problems, such as those with multiple behavioural problems and tendencies could make it difficult, if not impossible for a clear understanding and prioritization of response to dealing with the needs of these people. A clear evidence of this is found in Yates and Payne's (2006: 337–338) research illustration in which there appears to be a significant disjuncture between a NEET participant's (a young drug addict and a potential law-breaker) needs and the intervention strategy of NEET service providers. The service providers' focus was on EET destination whilst the participant's interest was on 'purging'

himself of his drug addiction. What this therefore suggests is that the act of identifying a substantial part of the nation's youth by defining what they are not (that is, not in education, employment, or training) is neither necessarily the most salient issue in their lives nor the most useful thing to know about them. In other words, the focus on NEET to label such young people fails to allow for or take account of the often significant differences in their lives, their reasons for being NEET, as well as the associated needs for support that they may have.

Practical issues

What in the context of this review is considered as the practical issues associated with NEET relate to the problems that emerge in practice when the term is used as a means of classifying young people and setting targets for measuring the effectiveness of intervention programmes. The first of these problems concern what Yates and Payne (2006) refer to as the encouragement of a 'fire-fighting approach'. This is evidenced in the way the NEET label is focused upon as a target measure of success with those categorized as exhibiting NEET symptoms. Central to this argument is the point that when faced with time constraints and/or limited resources, the service providers' use of NEET as a label in classifying young people and as a key point of focus for targeting service interventions may lead to, or has the possible tendency of leading to the concentration of attention on those NEET young people who can relatively be moved easily to EET destinations or work placements at the expense of others who, arguably in some cases, are in more urgent or greater need of such attention but do not receive it. As their research evidence (Yates and Payne, 2006) show, those groups of young people who received less attention either owing to time and resource constraints or bias targeting are clearly those who could not easily be moved to EET destinations. This principally is either because of other hidden problems or risks they faced that affected their ability or willingness to do so, or the conscious decision they may have made not to pursue such destinations.

Similarly, the emphasis on the transition from NEET to EET destination brings to the fore the issue of what Yates and Payne (2006: 341) again refer to as 'soft outcomes'. As noted in the literature and explicated in the analysis earlier on, a substantial segment of the population of the NEET group have multiple and profound risks which pose threats of social exclusion and disadvantage than does the fact that they are not in education, employment or training. For these young people, the risk issues present barriers to the NEET – EET transition, and so, they normally would expect the difficulties that these risks pose to be attended to before they are willing, or often able to consider making the move towards EET status or destination. Seen in this light, the too-early focus of NEET strategies and interventions on moving young people to EET has the potential tendency of resulting in those with multiple and profound problems being rushed or pushed into training and education that they may either not be ready for or consider less urgent than their complicated life problems. Also, the NEET-focused targeting equally has the potential propensity for diverting attention and intervention away, or could possibly neglect those young people who are, or may be potentially at risk of becoming NEET but who are already in EET. These criticisms, particularly the last, is symptomatic of the fact that more emphasis in the literature appears to have been placed on movement from NEET to EET status than either preventive support for those at risk of social

exclusion and/or becoming NEET, or sustaining young people in EET placement. This realization thus leads to consideration of a connected, ill-desired, and unintended, side effect of this NEET-focused targeting strategy: 'that it can lead to resources being marshaled towards a fire-fighting, rather than preventive approach' (Yates and Payne, 2006: 340–341).

Perceptions and experiences of young people labeled NEET

The research literature also indicates that although very many studies appear to have been conducted on NEET, it is only few of these studies that have actually engaged with the affected youth with a view to finding out about their lived experiences and perceptions of their NEETness. One of the useful research evidence from which NEET young people's views are expressed explicitly is that which was conducted by Yates and Payne (2006). In this study, the researchers question the appropriateness of the label NEET based on evidence from interviews they conducted with a group of young people tagged with the NEET label and who were receiving remedial interventionist help from 'ConneXions' service. In one of Yates and Payne's research evidence, a young mother interviewed, who, although not economically inactive, expressed her reticence to resume work immediately, unless of course her baby was weaned. For this young mother, just like many others, the NEET status was temporary and positive since the only significant reason for her not to be in work, education or training was her parenting responsibility. In yet another interview encounter in the same study, a drug addict at risk of becoming homeless and a persistent offender, openly expressed his readiness to secure a job only after he has sorted out his lifestyle. Although it could be argued that these examples are taken out of context, the point remains to be made that for the former, NEETness could be said to be a matter of choice. In the case of the latter, the problems of drug use, homelessness and offending behaviour appear to present a greater risk to him than does his lack of work, training or education. This thus goes to echo the inappropriateness of the NEET label to describing a heterogeneous mix of young people with very different potential needs for intervention.

In another study, Conrad (2005) re-thinks NEETness based on an interaction in a popular theatre project with a group of High School students deemed 'at-risk' of becoming NEET. The process involved the students taking roles in an improvised drama scene to explore issues they identified as relevant to their lives, especially those experiences that might deem them at-risk. The analysis of the students' representations and re-examinations of their experiences in the drama scenario leads Conrad to conclude that the students found the label 'at-risk' and its associated terminology of NEETness offensive. She argued that the student rejected the notion 'at-risk' on the grounds that their risky behaviour was a matter of choice, giving them back a sense of agency and control over their lives.

In a series of other research evidences (Kahan-Strawczynski, 2003; Maguire and Rennison, 2005; Hopwood and Hunter, 2006; Spielhofer et al., 2006), the point is made about young people labeled NEET or 'at-risk' of becoming NEET who perceived the variety of funding/support mechanisms and arrangements (e.g. the EMA, learning entitlement etc) useful, but felt that the level of funding were too low to make any significant impacts on their lives. Although this claim appears vague in the sense that it fails to point out directly the effect of the usage of the term NEET on the groups of young people so labeled, the

argument could be seen as illuminating Maguire and Rennison's (2005: 199) research evidence. The claim explains perhaps why the EMA for instance, and in Maguire and Rennison's view and explanation has been ineffective in re-engaging young people back into education between the ages of 16 and 18, once they had become NEET.

Although these are but few instances in which those categorized as being NEET or at-risk of becoming NEET have spoken concerning how they consider themselves and their circumstances, the differing accounts go to reiterate the inappropriateness of the usage of the term illuminated earlier. The accounts for instance endorse the suggestion that the act of identifying a substantial part of a nation's youth by defining what they are not fails to allow for the often significant differences in their situations, or to take account of the reasons for their NEET status and the associated needs for support that they may have (Yates and Payne, 2006: 338).

Conclusion

This paper has explored literature on existing research into NEET and has raised issues about its compatibility with the group of young people to whom it refers. In practice, the paper finds NEET as a service intervention label problematic owing to several significant issues which appear to attend to its applicability in context.

First, the evidence in this paper indicates there is a range of issues that lead to problematic NEET status. These include: deprivation; financial exclusion; low prior attainment; weak family and other support networks; stigma and attitudes of others; and debt aversion. As such, it is unhelpful, particularly for the purposes of service intervention, to conceive of, or perceive the whole NEET group and sub-groups as being homogeneous, facing similar difficulties and risks, and susceptible to identical forms of professional intervention. Among the NEET group are those young people (teenage mothers, students on a gap year and/or are into voluntary/charity work) for whom NEET is temporary and not necessarily a negative or problematic situation.

Second, the discourse of NEET sub-groups is problematic as it fails to focus more or allow leverage on the range of circumstances, characteristics and behaviours of young people in the NEET category. Within the main NEET category are groups of young people exhibiting or at risk of exhibiting more than one characteristic features of NEETness from the other sub-groups. As such, the compartmentalisation of these young people into sub-groups may not allow for a thorough discussion and/or investigation of their possible range of circumstances, characteristics and attributes. In this regard therefore, the continued use of the discourse of NEET sub-groups is, or may be unhelpful as it seems to suggest that the various groups making up the parent NEET category are mutually exclusive. Similarly, the continued use of NEET sub-groups may lead to a situation where solutions to deal with the problems of young people may be proposed to deal with groups rather than individuals.

Third, it is observed that the use of NEET to describe young people simply by what they are not may not be the most appropriate way of identifying a country's youth who need help to be able to make a successful transition from childhood to adulthood. Being NEET has become

viewed inherently in bluntly negative manner in policy terms—as reflective of a raft of risks, problems and negative orientations on the part of young people (Yates and Payne, 2006: 330). It is the considered view of this paper that perhaps, it may well be more appropriate and meaningful to re-conceptualise the NEET sobriquet as ‘needing EET’ (that is, needing education, employment and training)⁶. Arguably, this may not be a quick-fix to the problem as it might fall precisely into the trap which Yates and Payne (2006) identify: that the solution is implied by the label. However, the suggestion may perhaps have a ‘damage control effect’ on NEET as a service intervention label. That is, it may go to repair the negatively-perceived label under which young people in transition to adulthood are subsumed.

Fourth, the evidence in this paper suggest that the continued and stringent emphasis on the transition from NEET to EET destination, without necessarily understanding the range of circumstances, characteristics and attributes that go with such a transition could, or is liable to yield ‘soft outcomes’. That is, owing to the magnitude of the NEET problem, coupled with the diverse characteristic features that go with the experience of being NEET, any early and/or unscrupulous focus of NEET strategies and interventions on moving young people to EET status has the potential tendency of not yielding the intended outcomes. The practice may for instance result in those with multiple and profound problems to be rushed or pushed into training and education that they may either not be ready for or consider less urgent than their complicated life problems.

Lastly, since poor prior experience of education is only one factor in the problematic NEET category, solutions cannot be wholly educational as one is being made to believe, especially by Government policy intervention documentations. Health, housing and social services have an equally important role to play, often before educational, employment or training engagement can be attempted. In other words, a multi-agency approach rather than an individualized approach is needed to tackle the problems of the young people tagged as NEET.

Whilst there may be several general implications of the issues explored, the paper privileges one. That is, the need for further in-depth and empirical research involving the youth as participants and/or subjects. These kinds of research will provide, among other things, insights and understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of young people who are tagged as either being NEET or at risk of entering NEETness. These kinds of research will also have impacts on policy and practice, and thereby causing Government departments most especially to re-think and re-orient themselves properly towards designing appropriate intervention strategies to stem the flow from NEET to EET destinations.

Notes

1. Undoubtedly, social exclusion has many different definitions and facets. For the purposes of this paper, the notion is understood here as meaning the lack of participation in social life as a consequence of economic, cultural, human, social and identity capitals. (See, for example, SEU, 1997 for definition of social exclusion.) Economic exclusion on the other hand is simply taken to mean disengagement from the labour market either through the lack of education, training, skills or employment.

2. Although estimate produced by government sources are quoted in this paper, in practice, there are issues relating to the actual size of the NEET population. In particular, it has to be acknowledged that the NEET population and the typical characteristics of the NEET group vary significantly across a year, as such, snapshot statistics such as the one cited in this paper could be misleading.
3. The identification of this NEET sub-group within the research literature is relevant. However, it equally important to acknowledge that because estimates and/or percentages of youth belonging to the 'positive NEET group' are unknown, the argument about its absence in the NEET sub-groups is arguably not forceful enough. The fact that there is no hard data (estimates of percentages of youth who are not disadvantaged or likely to be at risk yet get labeled as NEET) to refer to makes the argument appear to loose weight. This thus necessitates further empirical research evidence to ascertain membership and significance of this sub-group.
4. The inclusion of this group of youth in the 'positive NEET group' does not necessarily imply that they are not likely to be disadvantaged or 'at risk of future NEET spell'. It is worth noting that the fact that they find themselves in the business of raising children means that in one way or the other, they are likely to be disadvantaged or at risk of becoming NEET. That notwithstanding, for the purpose of this paper, the group is included in the positive NEET group to demonstrate the inappropriateness of the label, particularly to those girls who have taken time out specifically for the purposes of procreation, and have childcare provisions in place to ensure that they return either to full-time education or employment without any hitches.
5. See for example, Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cote, 1997; Bynner, 1998; and Coleman, 1998 for further illustrations and definitions of the types of capitals identified here.
6. The principal argument of this paper concerns the misapplication of the NEET label to certain sub-groups of youth. However, it is not being suggested necessarily that by merely changing the label will cause changes in implementation or governmental policy direction. The central focus of the paper is on exploring and evaluating the issues surrounding NEET as a descriptive label and its compatibility with the group to whom it refers.

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