

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Consequences, risk factors, and geography of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

This paper summarises key findings from a study into the consequences, risk factors, and geographies of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) over the past two decades. The study uses the Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS) which links anonymised individual records from the 1991, 2001, 2011 Censuses and a wide range of data from a variety of sources. Scotland's censuses are also used in the analysis of the geographies of NEET.

Main findings

Consequences of NEET status

- Young people, who were NEET, remained disadvantaged in their level of educational attainment 10 and 20 years later. More than one in five of NEET young people in 2001 had no qualifications in 2011, compared with only one in twenty five of non-NEETS.
- There is a 'scarring effect' on economic activity. In comparison with their non-NEET peers, NEET young people in 2001 were 2.8 times as likely to be unemployed or economically inactive 10 years later.
- The scarring effect is also evident in the occupational positions that NEET young people take up, if they entered employment. For example, NEET young people in 2001 were 2.5 times as likely as their non-NEET peers to work in a low status occupation in 2011, if they found work.
- NEET experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor physical health after 10 and 20 years. The risk for the NEET group was 1.6-2.5 times that for the non-NEET group, varying with different health outcomes.
- NEET experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental health after 10 and 20 years. The risk of depression and anxiety prescription for the NEET group is over 50% higher than that for the non-NEET group.
- Young people who were NEET in 1991 and remained economically inactive in 2001 consistently demonstrated significantly poorer outcomes in 2011 than those who were non-NEET in 1991 and economically active in 2001 and

those who were engaged in employment or education in either 1991 or 2001. This suggests that there is a cumulative effect of being out of employment or education on later life chances and this group is the most disadvantaged that need continuing support.

- Young people who changed from NEET status in 1991 to employment or education in 2001 have lower risks of poor life outcomes compared with those who were consistently in disadvantaged positions. However, the negative effect of NEET status in 1991 was not fully discounted by the later engagement in employment or education, indicating the long-lasting detrimental effect of NEET experiences.
- Young people who changed from being non-NEET in 1991 to being economically inactive or unemployed in 2001 have higher risks of poor life outcomes compared with those who were consistently in employment or education. This suggests that economic activity in 2001 (when this group are in their late twenties) is also predictive of later labour market and health outcomes regardless of NEET status in 1991.

Risk factors of becoming NEET

- Educational qualification is the most important risk factor. No qualifications increased the risk of being NEET by 6 times for males and 8 times for females (for those born in the 1980s). No qualifications at SCQF level 5 or higher obtained by school stage S4 increase the risk of being NEET by 10 times for males and 7 times for females (for those born in the 1990s).
- Risk factors are consistent across the two cohorts studied and between males and females.
- Other school factors are important, including time absent from school and number of exclusions.
- Two factors are important for females: being an unpaid carer for more than 20 hours per week and teenage pregnancy.
- Household factors are also important. Living in a social renting household, living in a family that is not headed by a married couple, living in a household with no employed adults, and having a large number of siblings all increased the risk of becoming NEET.
- Local NEET rate is an important factor for both cohorts and genders, with the risk of NEET increasing with local NEET rate.
- A risk score derived from the statistical modelling has potential to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and perhaps guide interventions.

Geographies of NEET

- Census data reveals that there is a marked increase in the NEET rate with area deprivation and a tendency for higher NEET rates in more urban areas. The NEET rate varies greatly between local authorities, although some local authorities consistently have the highest rates in 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Background

The proportion of 16-19 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a key measure which feeds into the Scottish Government's 'Opportunities for All' policy, which is the Scottish Government's commitment to an offer of a place in learning or training for every 16-19 year old (up to their 20th birthday), with a specific focus on young people not in education, employment or training. It brings together a range of existing national and local policies and strategies, including More Choices More Chances and 16+ Learning Choices, as a single focus to improve young people's participation in post-16 learning or training.

In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, the Annual Population Survey (APS, formerly Labour Force Survey) has been used to monitor the size of the NEET group at the national level. Based on the APS, the number of NEET young people was consistently around 30,000 in Scotland between 1996 and 2013, accounting for 11%-15% of young people aged 16-19 (Scottish Executive 2006; Scottish Government 2015). The latest statistics, however, show that the number of NEETs in 2014 has dropped to around 21,000, accounting for only 8% of young people aged 16-19 yrs (Scottish Government, 2015).

It is important to conduct research into the phenomena of NEETs, and to understand the causes and consequences of being NEET. A NEET individual is defined as one who, at the time of the Census, is aged 16 to 19, either unemployed, or economically inactive due to looking

after home/family, permanently sick/disabled or other reasons. The findings from this research provides evidence of the long-term scarring effect of being NEET and will aid the identification of young people most at risk of becoming NEET. This research will help inform policies aimed at allowing Scottish Government to achieve its objectives around supporting young people into post-16 education, training and employment.

Findings

Outcomes – the 'scarring effect'

A number of socioeconomic and health outcomes have been examined for young people who were NEET. They include economic activity, occupations, limiting long-term illness, hospital admission following an A&E visit, hospital admission following an A&E visit due to self-harm, depression and anxiety, and drug misuse. Those who were NEET in 2001 and those who were NEET in 1991 consistently demonstrated highly significantly poorer labour market and health outcomes 10 and 20 years later.

The NEET group remained disadvantaged in their educational attainment 10 and 20 years later. More than one in five of NEET young people in 2001 had no qualifications by 2011 compared with only one in twenty five of non-NEETs.

For those aged 16-19 years in 2001 (Cohort 1), there is a scarring effect in economic activity. In comparison with their non-NEET peers, NEET young people were more than 2 times as likely to be unemployed or economically inactive 10 years later. The scarring effect is also evident in the occupational positions for NEET

young people who found work. For example, NEET young people were 2 times as likely as their non-NEET peers to work in a low status occupation in 2011.

NEET experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor health in the long-term. The risk for the NEET group is 1.6 – 2.5 times that for the non-NEET group varying with different physical health outcomes. NEET experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental health; the risk of depression and anxiety for the NEET group is over 50% higher than that for the non-NEET group.

For those aged 16-19 years in 1991 (Cohort 2), outcomes can also be observed at 10 and 20 years. The reference group are those who were non-NEET in 1991 and were employed or in education in 2001 (the most advantaged group). The potentially most disadvantaged group are those who were NEET in 1991 and were also out of employment and education in 2001. Two further groups consist of those who changed their status from being NEET in 1991 to being in employment or in education in 2001 and those who changed from non-NEET in 1991 to unemployed and not in education in 2001.

Young people who were NEET in 1991 and remained economically inactive in 2001 consistently demonstrated significantly poorer outcomes by 2011 than those in the reference group and those who were engaged with employment or education in either 1991 or 2001. This suggests that there is a cumulative effect of being out of employment and education on later life chances and this group is the most disadvantaged and in need of continuing support.

Those who changed from NEET in 1991 to economically active in 2001 showed poorer outcomes compared with those in the most advantaged group. This suggests that the negative effect of NEET status in 1991 was not fully discounted by the later engagement in employment or education, showing the long-lasting effect of NEET experiences.

Compared to the most advantaged group, the most disadvantaged group are about 9 times more likely to be unemployed/economically inactive in 2011, about 8 times more likely to have a hospital admission following a visit to A&E due to self-harm and about 9 times more likely to have a record in the Scottish Drugs Misuse Database.

Risk Factors (Predictors)

In general, the important risk factors are the same for both genders and for the two cohorts analysed - those observed as NEET or non-NEET at ages 16-19 in 2001 (Cohort 3) and 2011 (Cohort 4).

Educational qualification is the most important factor. Having no qualifications increases the risk of being NEET by 6 times for males and 8 times for females in Cohort 3 compared with those with Higher, HNC or degree level qualifications. No qualifications at SCQF level 5 or higher obtained by school stage S4 increases the risk of being NEET by 10 times for males and 7 times for females in Cohort 4 compared with those with at least 6 such qualifications.

Other school factors are important including the proportion of time absent from school, number of exclusions and being registered for free school meals.

Two factors are important for females: being an unpaid carer for more than 20 hours per week and teenage pregnancy. Females who were pregnant as a teenager were over 10 times as likely to be NEET as their non-pregnant counterparts. However, this is experienced by only a small proportion of females.

Local NEET rate is an important factor for both cohorts and genders, with the risk of being NEET increasing with local rate. This effect may work through more than one mechanism: fewer available opportunities, demotivating young people, a local culture where being NEET is the social norm and some areas may have been more affected by the loss of local employment.

Household factors are also important. Living in a renting household, living in a family that is not headed by a married couple, living in a household with no employed adults, having a large number of siblings all increase the risk of becoming NEET.

Geography

Census data analysis shows that deprived areas are consistently related to a higher proportion of NEET young people over the past two decades. Urban areas are also related to higher rates of NEET. Local authorities like Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde and North Ayrshire displayed higher NEET rates that were persistently above the national average between 1991 and 2011.

Policy implications

Our research has a number of policy implications.

- Disengagement from employment and education when young can lead to long-term consequences in employment, occupation and health. The social and economic costs can be considerable not only for individuals but also for society.
- Being consistently excluded from employment, education or training would exacerbate the long-term negative effect for NEET young people. Continuing support is needed for people who are excluded from employment or education persistently.
- The NEET problem should be tackled as part of wider strategies for social inclusion because many individual, household and local factors interplay and contribute to the risk of becoming NEET.
- Young people who have become disaffected with education are at greatest risk of becoming NEET. Measures to increase attendance and to boost attainment may help young people to avoid becoming NEET later on.
- In addition, area-based interventions and local coordination may be useful as NEET young people appear to be concentrated in more deprived areas and in some local authorities.

Conclusions

This study provides further evidence on the consequences, risk factors and geographies of being NEET in Scotland in the last two decades. There is strong evidence that there is a long-term scarring effect: the experience of being NEET appears to

be harmful for all socioeconomic and health outcomes that we investigated. Education, teenage pregnancy, local NEET rate and household factors are consistently important risk factors of being NEET. NEET young people appear to be disproportionately concentrated in more deprived areas and some local authorities. Reducing the number of young people with NEET status should continue to be an important policy concern.

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How to access background or source data

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