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Perceptions of NEET Youth on Unemployment: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study is to investigate, through a qualitative approach, the perceptions of unemployment among youth aged 18-29 who fall under the category of neither in education nor in employment (NEET), as well as the social, economic, and psychological dimensions of these perceptions. It is also intended that the unemployment experiences of NEET youth be comprehended, and policy recommendations be formulated based on these insights.

Materials and Methods: This study, designed with a phenomenological qualitative approach, was conducted with the participation of 12 unemployed, diploma-holding young individuals residing in one of Ankara's central districts and possessing relevant experience concerning the research topic. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form consisting of six questions.

Findings: It was revealed that nearly all NEETs (11 out of 12) included in the study expressed feelings of hopelessness regarding finding employment. Additionally, unemployment was identified as having potentially adverse economic and psychological effects.

Conclusion: The study's results clearly revealed that the participants experienced high levels of stress and anxiety due to long-term unemployment. Inadequate education and lack of practical experience severely reduced the participants' employment options. It was also determined that unemployment directly increased financial instability and concerns about future prospects.

Keywords

NEET,
Youth Unemployment,
Social Policy

JEL Classification

J21, J53, J64

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NEET Gençlerin İşsizlik Üzerine Algıları: Fenomenolojik Bir Yaklaşım

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı ne eğitimde ne istihdam (NEET) kapsamında olan 18-29 yaş arası gençlerin işsizlik olgusuna yönelik algılarını ve bu algıların sosyal, ekonomik ve psikolojik boyutlarını nitel bir yaklaşımla incelemektir. Çalışma, NEET gençlerin işsizlik deneyimlerini anlamak ve bu bağlamda politika yapıcılar için öneriler sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Fenomolojik nitel desene sahip bu araştırma, Ankara'nın merkez ilçelerinden birinde yaşayan, araştırma konusu ile ilgili deneyime sahip ve çalışmayan 12 diplomalı genç işsizlerin katılımıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, altı sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: Araştırma kapsamındaki NEET'lerin neredeyse tamamına yakını (11/12) iş bulma konusunda umutsuzluğa kapıldıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Bu durum, işsizliğin bireyler üzerinde hem ekonomik açıdan derinlemesine etkiler yarattığını hem de psikolojik açıdan olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç: Araştırma sonuçları, katılımcıların uzun süreli işsizlik nedeniyle yüksek düzeyde stres ve kaygı yaşadıklarını açık biçimde ortaya koymuştur. Yetersiz eğitim ve uygulamalı deneyim eksikliği, katılımcıların istihdam edilebilme şansını ciddi şekilde azaltmıştır. Ayrıca, işsizliğin doğrudan finansal istikrarsızlık ve gelecek beklentileriyle ilgili kaygıları artırdığı tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

NEET,
Genç İşsizlik, Sosyal
Politika

JEL Classification

J21, J53, J64

1. Introduction

In today's world, many countries, regardless of their level of development, are faced with the problem of unemployment. This problem, which also has socio-economic repercussions, has become a more critical issue to overcome, primarily due to the pandemic experienced in recent years. The seriousness of youth unemployment and the inclusion of young people with diplomas in this group have led to the discussion of the new concept of NEET (Neither in education nor in employment and training).

Unemployment is a significant problem that negatively affects both the individual and society in social, economic, political and psychological aspects (Işığışok,2019). According to TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute), the definition of unemployment includes "those who were not employed in the reference week, actively sought work in the last four weeks, and who can start work within two weeks if they find a job (TÜİK, 2021). However, those who are expecting to find a job and begin working and those who will begin working within three months are also included in the definition of unemployment" (TÜİK,2021). Unemployment, especially among young people, increases the risk of income loss and social exclusion at the individual level, while it can harm social welfare and productivity at the macro level (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). In this context, the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) situation, which can be defined

as a particular type of unemployment, indicates a segment where young people who are not in education and employment are excluded from the labour market and their access to employment opportunities is limited (Eurofound, 2016).

In particular, in the last 10 years, there has been an increase in the number of young people who are not employed and who do/can not continue their education or training. Concepts such as youth unemployment and discouraged workers, which have been discussed for a long time, have been inadequate in defining this problem experienced in the labour market, and this has led to the emergence of new concepts. One of these emerging concepts is the concept of young people being “*neither in education, nor in employment, nor training.*” One of the most intriguing aspects of the concept is that it covers a specific group or region. In other words, this group, called NEET, exhibits a heterogeneous structure; it has been seriously discussed in the literature in recent years, especially in the context of the significant differences in the way young people perceive life and their expectations from life due to the impact of technological transformation. The change in vital perception also brings about reflections on business life. While NEET young people carry the risk of entering a long-term unemployment cycle, this situation can lead to an increase in social inequalities and a slowdown in economic growth (Scarpetta, Sonnet & Manfredi, 2010). Therefore, the relationship between unemployment and NEET status is not only limited to individuals’ access to the labour market but also emerges as a structural problem that needs to be examined in depth from an economic and social policy perspective.

While unemployment is observed as a temporary phenomenon for most people, it is seen as permanent in some countries (OECD, 2016; Bell & Blanchflower, 2009). The perception of unemployment directly affects young people’s job search motivation, social integration, and psychological resilience. In this context, measuring the unemployment perception of NEET young people is critical to understanding the obstacles to their participation in the labour market and the social reflections of this perception.

2. NEET Concept and Its Determinants

The NEET concept first emerged in the 1990s due to a study conducted in the United Kingdom for marginalized individuals. The concept is an abbreviation of the first letters of the English phrase “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (Furlong, 2006). The Turkish equivalent of the concept is translated as “*Neither in Education, Nor Employment, Nor*

Internship/Apprenticeship/Placement (etc).” For example, Kılıç used the concept of NEET in his study as “*Neither in Education, Nor in Employment, Nor Training*” and abbreviated it as “NEİY” (Kılıç, 2014). Arabacı, on the other hand, used “NENİ”, which is the abbreviation of the expression “*Neither in Education Nor in Employment*” (Arabacı, 2020). The concept finally defined those not in employment and education in general as the term Status A (later changed to Status Zero). The concept of NEET (Neither in Education Nor in Employment Nor Training), which began to be used in the literature after 1980 and became more apparent after 2000, means the simultaneous loss of human capital’s development and production opportunity (Baş, 2019). In addition, international organizations such as the EU accept the concept as a kind of indicator (Mascherini, 2019).

Education and employability for the young population constitute the common goal of developed, developing and underdeveloped countries despite the differences in practices (Taş et al., 2018, p.285). Another concept that is frequently used and confused with the concept of NEET is youth unemployment. Although youth unemployment is not precisely defined, it can be defined as a group with the desire and willingness to work but cannot find a job at the current wage level. (Şahin and Murat, 2011; Noon & Heery, 2017). International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), where nations gather together under the umbrella of partnership, take the 15-24 age range as the reference range for the youth period in their studies (O’Higgins, 2001). At the same time, ILO defines *youth unemployment* as the situation of young people looking for a job and ready to work who cannot find a job (ILO, 2013). According to the OECD, youth unemployment is the situation where young people who have completed their education and are looking for a job cannot find a job within a certain period of time (OECD, 2020). According to OECD reports, youth unemployment is not only an economic problem but also a problem that can lead to social exclusion, increased crime rates and a slowdown in economic growth in the long term (OECD, 2020). The characteristics of young people within the demographic structure of a country require them to be evaluated and researched separately from other age groups. However, considering that compulsory education in the Republic of Turkey is 12 years, the completion of this education occurs between the ages of 18-19. In addition, many international organizations accept the upper limit of the age range for the concept of youth as 29 years due to the extended duration of schooling (Yentürk et al., 2012).

Limiting the group defined as NEET only by age range or unemployed status is not accurate. The high risk of social exclusion among NEETs, their dependence on their families and their lack

of economic freedom bring about social and psychological problems. Therefore, looking at young people from a different perspective is of substantial importance. Studies divide the concept of NEET into seven subgroups and each group includes different dynamics within itself. These subgroups are sick or disabled, those who begin working again, those with family care responsibilities, long-term unemployed, short-term unemployed, discouraged workers, and other inactive (Çizel et al., 2023). The first group is sick or disabled, and these individuals cannot participate in the labour market due to physical or mental health problems (Çizel et al., 2023). The second group is those who start working again, individuals who re-enter the labour market. This group takes an active role in the job search process even though they are temporarily unemployed. The third group is those with family care responsibilities. These individuals have withdrawn from the labour market due to family responsibilities such as childcare or elderly care (Eurofound, 2016). The fourth group, the long-term unemployed, consists of individuals who have been unable to find a job for more than a year and have entered a cycle of unemployment. These individuals are at risk of losing their motivation to search for a job due to the decrease in their chances of being employed (Scarpetta, Sonnet & Manfredi, 2010). The fifth group, the short-term unemployed, are individuals who are temporarily unemployed and can generally return to the labour market more quickly. The sixth group, discouraged workers, are individuals who have given up looking for a job for a long time and have not been able to get any results (Furlong, 2006). Finally, the other inactive group includes individuals who do not participate in the labour market for no apparent reason, and this group usually includes those who are entirely disconnected from the education or job search processes (Çizel et al., 2023).

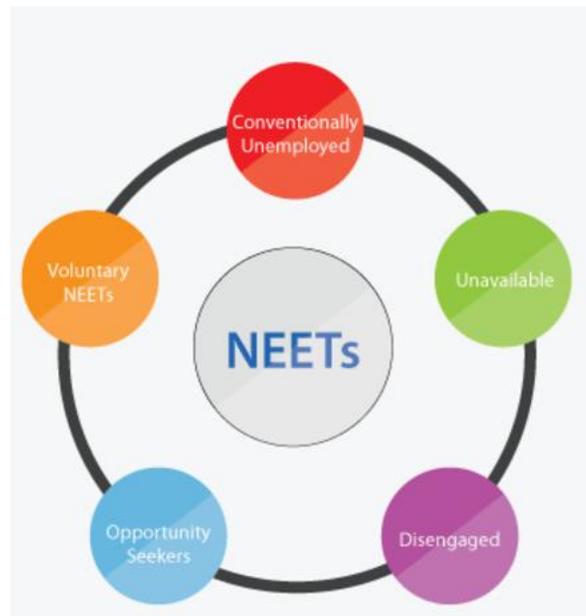


Figure 1. Those Included in NEET (Source: European Training Foundation (ETF, 2015,10)).

The category of not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a highly heterogeneous group. The literature has shown that there are many factors that affect being in this group. Some authors define “levels” of being NEET, and these levels include the timing of belonging to the NEET group, “those who have been classified as NEET for at least six months, including those who are “only NEET” at level 0” (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). Level 1 includes young people who remain NEET for a longer period of time and are unlikely to return to the labour market or education processes. This group faces the risks of economic insecurity and social exclusion. Level 2 represents the situation where the NEET status becomes permanent; individuals lose their motivation to find work and are included in the long-term NEET group. Young people at this level are at risk of being completely disconnected from the labour market and may experience serious social, economic and psychological problems (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). This levelling helps to understand the process of NEET status turning from a temporary situation to a permanent problem while also serving as a guide for social policymakers to determine which groups they should prioritise. In this way, it can be ensured that young people who are at the beginning of the unemployment process do not rise to higher levels.

Although the concept of NEET is used in the global literature, the age range defining the young segment varies from institution to institution. When we assess in terms of gender according to TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute) data; according to TÜİK data, the rate of NEET (neither in

education nor employment) youth between the ages of 18-29 in Turkey was recorded as 22.5% in 2023. When this rate is examined on a gender basis, it is seen that it is 29.8% for young women and 15.6% for men. These data demonstrate that particularly young women have a high representation rate in the NEET rate and indicate a significant difference between the genders (TÜİK,2024). It has been observed that there has been a slight downward trend in NEET rates in recent years; however, NEET rates in women are higher than in men.

Table 1

NEET Rates for 18-29 Year Olds

Year	Total Population (%)	Famale (%)	Male (%)
2018	32.1	47.2	17.2
2019	34.4	47.8	21.0
2020	37.4	50.5	24.4
2021	24.7	32.4	17.5
2022	24.2	32.3	16.4
2023	22.5	29.8	15.6

Source. TSI, 2024 (Turkish Statistical Institute)

It is possible to say that the social policy approaches on which the NEET phenomenon is based extend to welfare state classifications. These classification efforts, initiated by Wilensky and Lebaux (1958), were advanced by Titmuss (1974) and systematised by Esping-Andersen (1990) (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Esping-Andersen divided welfare regimes into three as: conservative, liberal and social democratic, and revealed the attitudes of each on employment, income distribution and social assistance. These classifications have formed an important basis for understanding the background of the systemic exclusion to which NEET youth are exposed. In the 2000s, the processes of youth transition to the labour market, particularly in developing countries, were examined more closely. Castiglioni (2000) analysed social policy reforms in Chile's

democratisation process, while the European Commission's (2011) thematic study on early school leaving emphasised the economic, social and individual reasons for disengagement from education. Kurtz (2002) evaluated the differences between targeted social policies and universalist approaches in Latin America, shedding light on the strategies adopted in different countries against the NEET phenomenon.

In the context of Turkey, Yıldız (2016) was the first to address the concept of NEET systematically and suggested that it be reflected in national policies. While Genda (2007) explained the reasons for young people's reluctance to seek employment in Japan with low-income jobs, this approach overlaps with the unemployment perceptions of young university graduates in Turkey. Toprak (2015) and Dericiler (2014) evaluated the limitations of Turkey's welfare policies on youth unemployment.

Studies conducted in recent years have drawn attention to field-based research that examines NEET youth in Turkey in more depth. While Ak et al. (2021) revealed the heterogeneous structure of NEET youth, Tolgay and Çakır (2022) emphasised long-term unemployment, informal employment, and tendencies to go abroad. Yıldırım (2022) addressed the skill mismatches and social isolation experienced by university graduate NEET youth; Önal (2023) examined 46 countries and revealed how the NEET phenomenon differs according to development levels.

In the same period, Chizel et al. (2023) analysed the factors shaping the NEET phenomenon in OECD-affiliated countries using the fsQCA method; the report prepared in partnership with the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services and UNDP-Turkey (2023) showed that low wages, lack of insurance and domestic responsibilities were the main obstacles for young women. Lüküslü et al. (2022) drew attention to the vagueness of job descriptions and stated that non-institutional forms of employment reinforced the NEET status.

While the OECD (2021d; 2021e; 2021f) promotes policies to increase inclusive growth and employment in addressing NEET, Toots et al. (2020) and Agh et al. (2021) assessed youth access to social policies in transition economies such as Estonia and Hungary, and the ILO (2019) analysed the impact of post-2000 social assistance reforms in Russia on vulnerable groups such as NEET.

Studies on NEET youth are shaped mainly around structural analyses, quantitative indicators and comparative policy evaluations. However, these approaches do not directly address

young people's daily life experiences, emotional vulnerabilities and perceptions of unemployment. This study, conducted with a qualitative research method, aims to evaluate the socio-psychological conditions of NEET youth, their perceptions of the labour market and their hopes for the future directly through their own narratives; thus, it aims to offer a perspective that complements the structural approaches in the literature. In this context, the study aims to contribute to both social policymakers and the academic field in developing more holistic and human-centred solution proposals.

3. Methods of Material

This section includes methodological information for all stages of the phenomenological qualitative study.

3.1. Research Method

This study used an interpretive phenomenological qualitative study method (Creswell, 2013; Erdoğan, Nahcivan, & Esin, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldana, 2011). In this context, the study aimed to examine the concept of “*perception of unemployment among NEETs*” thoroughly.

3.2. Participants of the Study

There are no definite numbers and limitations regarding the number of participants in qualitative studies (Tracy, 2019). However, in phenomenological studies, there are different numbers ranging from 3-4 to 19 people who have interest and experience with the concept being investigated (Creswell, 2013; Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). In this context, it is highly crucial to the study to yield healthy results that the participants in the study are carefully selected from people who have experienced the phenomenon in question in all its aspects (Creswell, 2021). In this framework, in line with the purpose of the study, young people between the ages of 18-29 who are not continuing their education and are not employed were included in the scope of the study. The purposeful and snowball sampling method determined NEETs among young people residing in Ankara. When the obtained data reached saturation, the research was completed with 12 NEETs. In this context, the purposeful sampling criteria are listed below;

- Residing in Ankara,
- Being between the ages of 18-29,

- Being unemployed for more than a year,
- Being unemployed with a bachelor's, associate's or high school degree,
- Agreeing to participate in the study.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form consisting of six questions was used to collect research data. Questions deemed necessary were asked according to the course of the interview within the framework of the researched concept, "Examining the perception of unemployment among NEETs."

3.4. Data Collection

The study is qualitative research conducted in one of the central districts of Ankara between September 1 and October 1, 2024. In order to conduct the study, approval was obtained from the Health Sciences University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee dated June 6, 2024 and numbered 2024/06. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants in the study by prior appointment. In-depth interviews, each lasting at least 45 minutes, were conducted. These interviews included questions aimed at understanding the participants' personal perceptions of their unemployment experiences, the difficulties they experienced during unemployment, especially the pressures from their environment, and their strategies for coping with unemployment in detail.

3.5. Data Analysis

Content, thematic, and descriptive analysis techniques were used inductively to analyse the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis is an analysis technique that aims to reveal the meaning of the data more concisely. In short, content analysis aims to reveal the "big picture" from the available data. It can be used in the analysis of many qualitative data such as text, audio, video, news, and websites (Leavy,2017). Descriptive analysis aims to explain the phenomenon under investigation by presenting the crucial statements obtained accordingly from the interviews in the form of quotations (Erdoğan et al., 2014). *Thematic analysis* is an important method used to reveal the factual patterns and the relationships between the patterns. The qualitative research process is outlined in Figure 1 (Creswell, 2014).

3.6. Role of the Researcher

The researcher has been actively involved in social policy and human resources management. The researcher, who holds a PhD in labour economics and industrial relations, aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis to understand the effects of economic, social and political factors on unemployment, lack of education and occupational integration.

4. Findings

The findings obtained in the study were evaluated through descriptive analysis of interview data. The findings obtained from the interviews conducted with young unemployed people who have not been employed or in education for more than a year were grouped and conveyed under specific headings. The first of these is the hesitation experienced by students regarding having an education that will facilitate their finding a job. Another category is future anxiety regarding not being able to find a job and not being able to work in a job suitable for their education after graduation. On the other hand, a significant portion of the youth expressed that they were concerned about being discriminated against in terms of finding a job. Another category is the extension of unemployment due to the low wage policy in recruitment despite the increase in the number of university graduates. Another critical heading is the increase in anxiety regarding employment due to the increase in the duration of unemployment and the increasing sense of uncertainty due to the volatility of political, economic and political situations in the country. The findings and evaluations related to each topic in the study were conveyed descriptively by directly quoting the participants' statements. In addition, in the direct quotations made in the text, the expression "F" indicates the participant. For example, "F. Male-1" indicates the male participant.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Level
K1	Female	19	Single	High School
K2	Female	18	Single	High School
K3	Female	26	Married	Bachelor's
K4	Female	25	Single	Bachelor's
K5	Male	25	Single	Bachelor's

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Level
K6	Male	22	Single	High School
K7	Male	28	Single	Associate's
K8	Female	24	Single	High School
K9	Female	29	Married	Bachelor's
K10	Male	28	Single	Associate's
K11	Female	28	Married	Bachelor's
K12	Male	27	Married	Associate's

Of the 12 NEETs in the study, 7 were female, and 5 were male. The female participants were between the ages of 18-29, and the average age was 24; the male participants were between the ages of 22-28, and the average age of the male participants was 26. When the educational backgrounds of the participants were examined, 1 of the male participants had a high school degree, 3 had an associate degree, and 1 had a bachelor's degree. In contrast, 3 female participants had a high school degree, and 4 had a bachelor's degree. It was observed that the level of education of the female participants in the study was higher than that of the male participants. When the participant's marital status was examined, it was seen that 3 of the female participants were married, 4 were single, 1 of the male participants was married, and 4 were single.

Theme 1: Psychological Effects of Unemployment

The interviews were conceptualised, and the answers were obtained as a result of questions regarding how participants perceived the unemployment problem and the biggest reason for unemployment. The participants generally described the unemployed with the concepts of not liking the job, not liking the wages, and lack of experience. Participants generally stated that employers require experience and that the unemployment issue increases due to low wages. NEET's statement regarding this finding is:

"Everyone around me is employed. I couldn't find a job despite being a university graduate. People's pitying looks seriously affect my psychology. I feel the unemployment obstacle deeply. I started using medication." (P4, Female, 25 years old)

"My hopes are diminishing every passing day. I cannot continue my education, I do not have the financial means. I feel useless. I cannot bear asking my mother for money." (P9, Female, 29 years old)

This theme reveals the heavy emotional burden of unemployment on NEET youth and its adverse effects on their mental health.

Theme 2: Education and Employment Mismatch

Participants stated that the education they received was insufficient to meet the expectations of the labour market and that lack of experience was a serious barrier to employment. In particular, participants with theoretical knowledge but were deprived of practical experience opportunities stated that they were forced to start their careers through low-wage processes such as internships. In addition, it was emphasised that factors such as the geographical location and prestige of the university they graduated from were also decisive in the recruitment process and that this situation caused individuals who graduated from provincial universities to experience inequality of opportunity. NEET's statements regarding this finding are as follows:

"They want us to be both educated and experienced in job applications. How can we gain experience without working? We are forced to work like intern slaves; if you do not have connections, you cannot find a full-time job. Furthermore, a part-time job seems meaningless." (P11, Female, 28 years old)

"I attended many certified courses during my university education. I devoted most of my free time and funds to improving myself. Nevertheless, since the university I graduated from was in the countryside, I was eliminated in most interviews." (P3, Female, 25 years old)

This theme reveals that young people's efforts to obtain an education are not sufficiently rewarded due to inequalities in opportunity in the current labour market.

Theme 3: Dissatisfaction with the Wage Level

Participants stated that insufficient wage offers increased their tendency not to accept a job and that this situation negatively affected their employment motivation. Individuals stated that they experienced not only economic but also metaphoric dissatisfaction. The fact that the market does not reciprocate the knowledge and skills acquired through education causes the individual to feel worthless and creates a serious rupture in the labour-wage relationship.

"The salary they offer does not even cover the travel expenses. Putting in so much effort and finally settling for these wages makes one feel that one's labour is worthless." (P6, Male, 22 years old)

"Unemployment is bothersome, but working for a low wage is equally frightening. I cannot plan my future with these wages. In other words, I cannot get married or have a career." (P8, Female, 24 years old) expressed his concern with the wage level.

This theme reveals how economic factors shape NEET youth's decisions to participate in the labour force. While individuals act with the expectation that they will achieve better living conditions through education, the situation they encounter in the labour market apparently reveals that this expectation is not met.

Theme 4: Social Pressure and Family Expectations

Participants stated that they felt severe social oppression due to their families and society's expectations of marriage, finding a job, and "being successful" during their unemployment process. Unemployed male participants, in particular, stated that they felt more intense pressure due to the "economic provider" identity imposed by gender roles. On the other hand, female participants stated that they received advice from their families and people around them to secure their social status through marriage in case they could not find a job. NEET statements regarding this finding:

"Being unemployed as a man is much more difficult. Your family and society expect you to be financially responsible. They expect you to find a job right away, then you are expected to complete the military service, and then you are expected to get a job again and get married. Women are luckier in this regard." (P10, Male, 29 years old)

"When I could not find a job, they started telling me that I should get married right away. If you are a woman, it is perceived as if marriage is the best solution. It was a very depressing process." (P4, Female, 25 years old)

This theme shows that unemployment is not just an individual obstacle but a struggle intertwined with social norms.

Theme 5: Anxiety and Hopelessness About the Future

A significant number of participants expressed that they have serious concerns about the future due to the ongoing economic stagnation, high unemployment rates and political uncertainties in the country. This concern is perceived as a factor that threatens not only their short-term job prospects but also their long-term living standards, professional development and individual freedoms.

"Most of my friends are thinking of going abroad. We think we have no future here." (P9, Female, 29 years old)

"It seems impossible to find a job even with minimum wage. My hopes are diminishing day by day." (P2, Female, 18 years old)

This theme reveals that young people's trust in the country's socio-economic structure is weakening, and their sense of social belonging is eroding. Thus, unemployment emerges as an obstacle that has the potential to have consequences not only at the individual level but also at the macro level, such as the risk of the country losing its qualified human resources.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the entire world has entered a severe process of change and transformation. This shift and transformation has affected every area, from daily life habits to working life, consumption habits, and education approaches. In the highly competitive environment, the importance of human resources for institutions has been increasingly emphasized (. In particular, the flexibility of the labour market has led to the diversification of flexible working styles along with the development of technology. While this process has enabled the opening of new job fields on the one hand, it has also made it inevitable for the mass of unemployed to increase. A significant portion of this mass consists of NEET individuals.

The most crucial problem of NEETs is economic dependency. Studies on NEETs have helped reveal the concept's different characteristics over time. It is seen in the literature that the concept of NEET is explained, particularly with demographic variables. The concept of NEET depends on many factors that can be discussed at the individual or macro level (Caroleo et al., 2020). These factors are generally the family's socio-economic background (Bynner & Parsons, 2002) and the education and employment of the parents (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). Even if the person is educated, the probability of being NEET is much lower for those with educated parents than those with uneducated parents (Kevelson et al., 2020). Therefore, education is one of the two most basic dimensions in NEETs. There is a direct proportion between the level of skills acquired during the education process and the level of employment in the labour market, and education is the most critical parameter that increases job opportunities (Biçerli, 2011). It is possible to say that those who do not continue their education among their age group are more likely to be NEET. The research findings suggest that education is an essential criterion for finding a job. Preventing young

people from leaving the education system at an early age, encouraging vocational and technical education, and increasing hybrid education models by taking advantage of technology can play an essential role in keeping young people in the education system.

In Turkey, it is also supported by various empirical studies that a large proportion of NEET youth face long-term unemployment and that this situation has adverse effects, particularly on mental health. The qualitative research conducted by Yıldırım (2022) reveals that NEET individuals who are higher education graduates experience feelings of social isolation, depression and social exclusion. Similarly, Şahin et al. (2021) state that NEET youth distance themselves from social relations due to unemployment, that family tensions increase and that individuals lose trust in state policies. These findings are consistent with the qualitative data of our study. The psychological effects of unemployment are not limited to the individual level but also lead to social consequences. In this context, it is not sufficient for policies aimed at NEET youth to focus only on creating employment. Mental health support, psycho-social counselling and the establishment of mechanisms that will strengthen social solidarity play a critical role in preventing these young people from being pushed out of the system.

The disconnect between education and employment stands out as one of the main structural reasons why NEET youth in Turkey remain outside the system. The vast majority of young people who participated in the study clearly stated that the education they received did not meet the expectations of the labour market. In particular, new graduates stated that despite being equipped with theoretical knowledge, they were excluded from employment processes due to their lack of experience and the demand for “ready-made labour” in the market. This situation leads to the perception that the education system has lost its “job placement” potential and that the market leaves young people’s efforts unrewarded. In analyses conducted on youth unemployment in Turkey, it has been determined that the level of education does not provide a guarantee for employment; on the contrary, unemployment rates among higher education graduates are increasing (TÜİK, 2023). It is observed that particularly young people who graduate from provincial universities face a serious “brand disadvantage” after graduation. This situation reveals that young people are excluded not only individually but also through the institutions from which they graduated.

The findings show that it is not sufficient for the education system to equip young people with academic knowledge alone; it should evolve into a structure that guides them according to the market dynamics, provides mentoring and provides experience. Supporting young people with career planning mechanisms, as well as practical internships carried out in cooperation with sectors throughout their education process, can contribute to eliminating this disconnect.

Dissatisfaction with wage levels stands out as one of the main factors determining the tendency of NEET youth to participate in the workforce. In the interviews conducted within the scope of our research, participants clearly stated that their motivation to accept jobs decreased due to the low wages of the job opportunities they encountered. This situation was associated not only with economic reasons but also with the perception that individuals' labour was being devalued.

Low-wage jobs, common among young people in Turkey, create a sort of "disguised unemployment" situation due to expectations that cannot be met qualitatively despite the quantitative continuity of employment. The view that low wages cause young people to avoid employment is quite common in the literature. Genda (2007), in his study on young Japanese people, shows that the inadequate perception of the financial and personal benefits of work negatively affects young people's motivation to seek employment. Similarly, Tolgay and Çakır (2022) emphasised that low wages and overly demanding working conditions are the determining factors for young people in Turkey to remain in NEET status. In this context, it is observed that wages are not only a means of making ends meet but also a factor that determines the social status and self-esteem of the individual. In particular, when educated young people sense they are not getting the reward for their education, they may reject low-wage jobs and completely withdraw from the workforce.

The theme of social pressure and family expectations reveals that unemployed youth are under significant psycho-social oppression, particularly in line with expectations from their families and wider social circles. The findings that social pressure differs in gender-based forms are also noteworthy. This finding also overlaps with Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity; therefore, unemployment undermines the normative power position of the male individual expected in the patriarchal order. For female participants, unemployment is generally experienced as intertwined with marital pressure.

Studies have also revealed that family roles, traditional expectations, and gender stereotypes are decisive in young people's transition to NEET status. Şahin et al. (2021) have revealed that the main reason why the vast majority of NEET women in Turkey do not participate in the workforce is that they are identified with the role of "housewife." This situation shows that young people's individual choices are limited in family environments where gender roles are reproduced and that being NEET is not only a structural but also a cultural outcome. In this context, social policy proposals to be developed should not be limited to providing employment; they should include structures that consider gender equality, question social role expectations, and strengthen family support mechanisms.

The findings obtained within the scope of future anxiety and discouragement reveals that NEET youth have lost their hopes for the future under the current socio-economic conditions, and, as a result, they experience significant desperation and uncertainty. Most of the participants stated that they have become unable to make plans not only in the short term but also in the long term due to the economic situation of the country they live in, job insecurity and political uncertainty. This situation weakens the ties of NEET youth to the system and leads to a severe erosion in their sense of social belonging.

The situation that NEET youth are in should be seen not only as an employment obstacle but also as an obstacle to shaping the future. The fact that young people encounter structural obstacles that cause disappointment in the decisive periods of their lives negatively affects their identity development, beliefs and psycho-social resilience. In Turkey, young people's orientation to work abroad is also an extension of this concern. According to the Youth's Future Outlook Report published by TEPAV (2022), it was determined that 67% of young people between the ages of 18-29 wish to live abroad. The same report reveals that the main reasons for this trend are economic instability, unemployment, incompetent governance and insecurity about the future. In this context, the future anxiety of NEET youth should be considered not only at the individual level but also as a crisis area that produces macro-level results such as social development and human capital, and this needs to be resolved. Considering the speed that technology has gained; while even the educated and market-based workforce needs to renew their competencies; it can be said that this group's chance of finding employment may decrease even more and the youth unemployment problem may deepen even more. The realisation of new departments to be established in universities by conducting market research and establishing a healthy education-labour market

relationship may play an crucial role in reducing NEETs. Considering the speed that technology has gained, while even the educated and market-based workforce needs to renew their competencies, it can be said that this group's chance of finding a job may decrease even more, and the youth unemployment problem may deepen even more. The realization of new departments to be opened in universities by conducting market research and establishing a healthy education-labour market relationship can play an essential role in reducing NEETs.

Declaration of Research and Publication Ethics

In order to implement this comprehensive survey method, permission was obtained from the Health Sciences University Trabzon Faculty of Medicine Scientific Research Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 2024/06 dated 06.06.2024, and the study complied with research and publication ethics.

Researcher's Contribution Rate Statement

Since the author is the sole author of the article, his contribution rate is 100%.

Declaration of Researcher's Conflict of Interest

There are no potential conflicts of interest in this study.

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