



TO BE YOUNG, ALIENATED AND UNEMPLOYED: SOCIAL IDENTITY, ATTITUDES AND WELL-BEING OF GEORGIA'S NEET YOUTH

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Abstract

Education and employment are essential factors for social inclusion of young people in society, so it is important to study young people who are neither in education or in employment (called NEETs) to determine how they deal with their social status and their mechanisms to integrate into society.

This study examines how negatively or positively NEET young people perceive their social status, how NEET status affects young people's attitudes, social identity, or well-being, and whether young people try to escape from the status of NEET. The survey was conducted with 380 young people and in-depth interviews with 12 people.

Research shows that the social status of NEET is neither desirable nor appreciated. NEETs are associated with diminished well-being mainly because of their lower life satisfaction. NEET youth scores lower than the general population in life satisfaction, although they have similar level of self-esteem. Research has shown that NEET youth use psychological mechanisms, such as identifying with a positively assessed group, to help young people maintain high self-esteem or use strategies to escape from the NEETs group, get a job, or continue their education. The following factors positively contribute to the desire to leave the NEET group: self-esteem is the most important motivator, followed by social identity, attitudes towards education and employment, and family economic status.

The high NEET rate in Georgia suggests that NEETs youth should be a particular target group for interventions to enable their 'activation' to integrate into society.

Keywords: *attitudes towards education, attitudes towards employment, NEET youth, social identity, well-being*

Introduction

Education and employment of young people are essential issues in the modern world. Studies show that education is closely linked to employment opportunities, social inclusion, and human capital development in general (Balatti & Falk, 2002). An educated workforce quickly masters innovative technologies that help them find suitable employment and attain career advancement (Nelson & Phelps, 1966). Quality education gives a person the opportunity to be employed, earn

an income, and socialize with others (O'Dea et al, 2014). Termination of education at an early age reduces employment opportunities in high-paying fields and diminishes the competitiveness of young people in the labor market. People with an incomplete education are at greater risk of poverty than those with a complete secondary education (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The consequences of early educational termination negatively contribute to the mental health of young people.

Unemployment is a negative experience associated with financial problems and declining social ties (Bolton & Oatley, 1987). Unemployment may cause a decrease in human contact, since friendships are harder to maintain when people do not work in any organization. High levels of youth unemployment negatively affect the personal lives and well-being of the jobless. Unemployment contributes to social exclusion and isolation in what is called "social disqualification" (Paugam, 1996), especially when long-term (Lorenzini & Giugni, 2012).

As education and employment are essential determinants of social inclusion, young people who are not employed or educated are considered at risk of social exclusion (Roberts, 2005). Young people who are neither involved in education nor employed are called NEETs. NEET group is at the core of the European policy debate and many interventions are envisioned to bring them back to education and /or the labor market. European member states have experience designing and implementing various policy measures (Mascherini, 2020) to reintegrate youth within higher education or the labor market. For example, the policy of the "Youth Guarantee program" indicates a situation in which young people are guaranteed to receive a good offer of employment, a grant or scholarship for continuing their education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship within four months of losing employment or leaving formal education" (Council of the European Union, 2013). Such programs have been successfully implemented in several countries, including Austria, Finland, and Sweden, since the 1990s (Mascherini, 2020).

There are several reasons for becoming NEET. The results of various research revealed that parents' educational level and support may be important as protective factors against young people becoming NEET. In terms of gender-specific variables, survey results reveal that a lack of autonomy harmed males, while parental intrusiveness mainly impacted females. These findings are consistent with the results of other research studies (Bynner & Parsons, 2002), which shows that parents with lower educational levels have less capability in advising children about future educational choices; furthermore, as negative role models, uneducated parents may lead offspring to make poor decisions in applying for admission or successfully completing a higher education. In another study, Bäckman et al (2014) examined the reasons for NEET status in three Swedish-born cohorts. As the study showed, all groups' individual-level risk factors were the same for NEET status. Bainer and Parsons (2002) concluded that achieving low education is essential for NEET status. Factors also include lack of resources in childhood and adolescence, social problems, and health and education-related challenges.

In another study, Bäckman et al., (2014) examined the reasons for NEET status in three Swedish-born cohorts. As the study showed the individual level risk factors of all groups were the same for NEET status. Bainer and Parsons (2002) concluded that achieving low education is an important factor for NEET status. Factors also include lack of resources in childhood and adolescence, social problems, health, and education problems.

Social status can affect individuals and shape their identity and well-being. Education is also essential because it creates a basis for employment and offers the means to elevate oneself from a lower social status. Social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theories (Turner, 1987) can be used to analyze how young people within the NEET demographic perceive NEET status or if they identify themselves with NEET group.

Tajfel (1978, p. 63) defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from (...) his knowledge of (...) membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". Hence, individuals develop their social identities from affiliation with broader groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is easy for individuals who belong to groups with a high status to identify with them as this is a rewarding affiliation, while the opposite is true regarding those with low status (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that the lower and inferior the group's status is, the less its contribution to forming a positive social identity. One relevant criterion for comparison

with others is employment. Unemployment status is likely to prevent unemployed individuals from developing a positive sense of self based on group membership. Thus, they may experience devaluation, which affects their overall self-esteem, leading to lower levels of well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014). It will contribute to the formulation of a negative social identity.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), six main strategies can be identified to manage disadvantaged group positions; among them are individual and group-based initiatives. These strategies are: (a) *individual mobility* (i.e., people aim at leaving the in-group to become a member of another group); (b) *recategorization at a higher level* (i.e., people claim as individuals belonging to a broader and positively evaluated group rather than thinking of themselves belonging to the lower category group); (c) *social competition* (i.e., people attempt to gain a positively evaluated group status level for their group); (d) *realistic competition* (i.e., this group of people aim at receiving more material resources than the other group); (e) *preference for temporal comparison* (i.e., a comparison of the present situation with the past (before reunification) is perceived as more relevant than other comparison), and (f) *reevaluation of the material dimension* (i.e., people devalue the material dimension as less critical for their positive social identity) (Mummendey et al., 1999). Individual mobility and categorization at a higher level are individual strategies, while social competition and real competition are collective behaviors and closely related. Preference for temporal comparison and reevaluation of the material dimension are examples of creative strategies.

Research shows that attitudes can be influenced by social identity processes (Hogg & Smith, 2007). Attitude as an intrapersonal construct determines a person's favorable or unfavorable response to specific social objects. Group status affects attitudes towards group members and their desire to leave or not that group, even with children (Nesdale & Flesser, 2001). A positive attitude towards education or employment may become a kind of motivation of enlightenment and will be reflected in a specific behavior in the future.

Well-being is a subjective evaluation of how one feels about and perceives one's own life. Well-being is mainly associated with positive beliefs, good feelings and satisfying relationships, along with a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Friedli, 2009). Social psychology analysis uses the following indicators of well-being: high self-esteem and life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1996). Membership in a group that shares our goals and interests is expected to increase self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which will have a positive impact on well-being (Brenden, 1969).

The Context of Georgia

Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the European Union (including the Establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, AA/ DCFTA) in 2014, which creates a basis for cooperation between the EU and Georgia on employment, social policy, and equal opportunities (Chapter 14, Articles 348–354, Annex XXX) in the fields of education, training, and youth (Chapter 16, Articles 358–361, Annex XXXII).

Georgia has a low share of primary school dropouts (around 7%) and a high share of those who are educated (25%). However, the share of Georgian youths not involved in employment, education, and training endeavors (NEET) is also high (28% in 2019). The analysis of the European Training Foundation (ETF) based on secondary data of youth transition from education to work (Diakonadze & Bardak, 2018) shows that 60% of NEETs in Georgia are females who are more likely to be graduates with a medium-level general and Vocational Education and Training (VET) (ETF, 2015b). The primary reason for being NEET is linked to time-consuming responsibilities for family care, early marriage (UNFPA, 2014). In Georgia, domestic tasks, including child-rearing and elder-care are performed largely by women, resulting in their economic inactivity. Among other reasons for unemployment are discouragement, disability, illness, and other personal factors. According to ETF research, the individual's education level does not contribute much to being NEET, although those with secondary VET and upper secondary education have the highest probability of being NEET in Georgia.

Research Problem

Though there is much research worldwide on how individual, familial, and contextual factors are associated with the risks of becoming NEET youth, research on psycho-social factors underlying the formation of NEETs is limited, especially in Georgia. As education and employment are important factors for social inclusion and self-realization of young people in society, it is relevant to study the youthful social strata that are neither in education nor employment to determine how they deal with their social status and their mechanisms to integrate into society.

Thus, the current research was focused on studying a range of topics surrounding the NEETs phenomenon: from self-perception and group affiliation to social integration strategies.

The research aimed to analyze the following issues:

1. How negatively or positively do NEETs youth perceive their own status?
2. Is NEETs status related to corresponding internal factors (such as attitudes towards education and employment) or other external factors?
3. Which social groups do NEETs youth choose to identify with – those within or outside of the NEETs demographic?
4. Do NEETs youth share the same perceptions of well-being as society in general, or do they measure their own happiness by a different scale of values?
5. Do affected youth try to escape from their NEETs status? What mechanisms do they use, and how do other social factors contribute to this attempt?

This type of research is essential in its applications. These psychological factors, - including attitudes, social identity, and well-being significantly impact the successful integration of young people into society or their long-term alienation.

Research Methodology

General Background

Education and employment significantly determine the integration of young people into society. Therefore, young people who are neither in education or in employment (so-called NEETs) have to deal with their social status and use various mechanisms for integration into society.

Only a few research in the Georgian context have been conducted mainly within the master's theses focused on the study of attitudes of young people behind education or employment towards various social issues. However, there is no research on psycho-social factors underlying the formation of NEETs in Georgia. The psychological factors, such as attitudes, social identity, or well-being have significant impact on the successful integration of young people into society. Due to a lack of empirical research experience in this field, research instruments also need to be developed and piloted.

Thus, the current research was focused on studying a range of topics surrounding the NEETs phenomenon: from self-perception and group affiliation to social integration strategies. This research is important both from a scientific point of view as well as for the development of evidence-based social policy to bring NEET youth back to education and /or the labor market.

Social identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theories (Turner, 1987) can be used to analyze how young people within the NEET demographic perceive NEET status or if they identify themselves with NEET group. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior can be used to explain how one of the main factors underlying the desire to leave the NEETs group is a positive attitude towards vocational education and employment (Ajzen, 1991).

The research was conducted through survey research and qualitative interviews. The online survey was carried out in May-June 2021 with 380 young people and qualitative interviews with 12 participants during the same period.

Sample

In total, 380 young people (200 females and 180 males) took part in Tbilisi and three other rural areas covered in the study: Tbilisi – 107; Batumi- 98; Telavi – 60 and Kutaisi- 85. The average age was 22 years ($SD = 3.55$; min_17, max_29); the Confidence level was 95, and the confidence interval was 5.

Study participants were selected based on convenience sampling. The sample did not represent the whole population as the target group of the research belonged to the vulnerable group of society.

The following criteria determined the selection of the participants: 1) individual of age group 15 -29 years; 2) based on ILO criteria, i.e., “unemployed” was a term we applied to anyone 15 years or older who did not to work (even for one hour) before the interview for seven days, or was looking for a job for at least four weeks and was ready to work in the next two weeks. To these criteria, one more was added - not been involved in any educational program during the past 12 months.

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical norms. All respondents made an “informed” consent to participate in the research. They could stop participating in the study at any stage of the study. Confidentiality was guaranteed.

Instrument and Procedures

The research tool was a questionnaire that included questions on the following variables: respondents’ demographic characteristics, marital status, education, unemployment experience, evaluation of NEET status, attitudes towards education and employment, measures of social identity, happiness, and well-being (self-esteem and life satisfaction).

Respondents were asked to evaluate the status of a group of young people not involved in education or employment according to three 7-point Likert-type scales where (-3) - was very negative and (+3) very positive.

1. Inferior status - superior status
2. Undesirable status - desirable status
3. Not appreciated in the community - appreciated in the community.

Attitudes towards education and employment were measured according to a 7-point scale where (-3) was very negative and (+3) very positive.

The social identity measure was based on Weimeich’s (1980) social identity instrument. Eleven relevant descriptive constructs were selected and tested in piloted, semi-structured interviews. Researchers identified eleven items measured according to a 7-point Osgood’s Semantic differential scale. These scales were

1. Friendly - Unfriendly
 2. Happy - Unhappy
 3. Pessimistic - Optimistic
 4. Popular - Unpopular
 5. Passive - Active
 6. Able to take initiative - unable to take initiative
 7. Wealthy - Unhealthy
 8. Talented - Not talented
 9. Uneducated - Educated
 10. Successful - Unsuccessful
 11. Dependent - Independent
- ($\alpha = .865$).

The respondents first evaluated themselves on the scale, then who quieted education and were unemployed at the same (NEET peers) time and last the peers who continued education (Non-Neet peers).

A questionnaire for study participants was given a scale of “faces” measuring happiness (Andrews & White, 1976). Respondents were asked to choose one of the seven positive and negative emotions that most accurately expressed their current attitude towards their own lives.

Well-being was measured on two scales: self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) and life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1996). The questionnaire used the Rosenberg 10-point self-assessment scale (1965), which was adapted to the Georgian language (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$) (Sumbadze et al., 2012). A 7-point scale of life satisfaction adapted to the Georgian language was used in tandem.

The research was conducted following ethical norms in a self-administered form. All respondents gave “informed” consent to participate in the research. They were fully informed about the research's aim and could stop participating in the study at any stage.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 NEET youth, 6 females, and 6 males, aged 18 to 25 years. The number of interviews was due to the fact that research shows data saturation can be achieved in qualitative interviews usually around 6-12 studies (i.e. Glaser and Straus 1967, Morse 1994, etc.).

The interviews were focused on the perception of NEET status, reasons for dropping out of school or university, evaluation of the decision made, the importance of education, and the future plans of the young people. Qualitative interviews were transcribed for content analysis.

Data Analysis

SPSS 26 program was used to perform quantitative data analysis; descriptive statistics were used as part of the data analysis. Correlational analysis was utilized to assess bivariate associations among continuous variables, while Chi-squared tests were applied to examine the relationships among categorical variables. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to identify whether various factors significantly predicted young people's desire to escape from the NEETs group. In-depth interview results were transcribed and analyzed by qualitative content analysis.

Research Results

Reasons for Becoming a NEET Youth

The most significant percentage of the respondents, 89.3%, identifies their family's low socio-economic status and the need to start working immediately as a reason for dropping out of school. An additional 4.7% of the respondents planned to continue their studies in vocational education and offered this as the reason they stopped academic studies. However, their plans changed. Another 3.2 % of the respondents were not interested in studying, so they terminated their education. Others named other reasons: marriage, conflict within the family, and conformity with peers (see table 1).

In-depth interview respondents noted:

“We had a hard time in our family, so I decided to drop out of school; I wanted to find a job, but I still could not get one” (18-year-old male).

As Table 1 shows, the majority of respondents decided to drop out independently (89%), while the minority of respondents did so based on someone else's advice (parent, friend, school psychologist).

According to the interviews, although many parents opposed their children's plans to drop out of school, the young people were determined to follow their own course:

"I thought a lot and decided to leave school; My mom did not want me to, but I persuaded her" (19-year-old female).

As it turns out, students generally started thinking about dropping out much earlier, around the 8th grade, although the final decision was made in the 9th grade. 9th grade is crucial because students have to decide if they will continue their studies in the field of vocational education or secondary education or if they drop out of education to enter the labor market.

According to the respondents, about 28.2% think their peers dropped out of school after the 9th grade, which shows that young people believe it is not common practice among their peers.

About 62.8% came to regret their decision with time.

"I think I acted foolishly, somehow could I score 6-7 grades and finished school; Maybe it would be easier to get a job, even if I was uneducated" (18-year-old male).

while about 1/3 of respondents suppose that they made the right decision when they terminated their studies.

"For what reason should I go to school? They teach you nothing! I still could not pass the final exams, and I would not earn my diploma" (20-year-old male).

However, the respondents overall would not suggest that other young people drop out of school. In their opinion, both high-achieving and unmotivated students should stay in school and try their best to graduate from high school, because it requires time and experience to appreciate the long-term significance of education.

"I would not advise others to give up studying; being in class is more rewarding than sitting at home; you lose friends, classmates, teachers. I would not recommend it" (21-year-old male).

Table 1

Information about Terminating Education

Reason for leaving school	%
I needed to start a job because of my family.	45.8
My family could not support my education.	43.5
I was going to continue VET	4.7
I lost interest in school.	2.2
Other factors	3.8
Factors influencing decision making	
Parental advice	3.5
Friends' advice	2.7
Personal decision	89
Advice of school psychologist	2.4
Teachers' advice	2.4

Evaluation of the decision	
It was the correct decision	37.2
It was the wrong decision and I regret it	62.8
Planning to continue my education	
Yes, in VET	43.1
Yes, higher education	2.3
No	17.3
Difficult to answer	37.3
Should others terminate their education early?	
Yes	11.8
No	88.2

According to the survey results, the study participants are unemployed.

"I think sometimes I still could find a job if I tried. But I cannot! I am always searching for jobs on Jobs.Ge. I am tired so I can no longer do it! This is horrible" (22-year-old female).

Almost half of the respondents mentioned the lack of available jobs as one of the central factors hindering their own employment (50%). One-quarter of the respondents, 25.0%, believe that the leading cause of their own unemployment is their lack of education, while a smaller proportion name family conditions. A small percentage also believes that their personal problems, laziness, and health issues have led to their unemployment.

Among those surveyed, 31% have some working experience, the most recent being some 13-15 months prior to the survey. They earned money on an informal basis, mainly without steady salaries, often on a per diem basis, in positions such as construction assistant, day laborer on a farm during harvest season, cleaner, caregiver at home. As they noted, the jobs were mainly short-term, and they were not asked to work again as there was no need from the employers' side. Daily payment ranged from 20-35 GEL (5.60-9.80 Euros by 13.03.2022).

Attitudes towards Education and Employment of NEET Youth

A positive attitude towards education may become a kind of motivation of enlightenment and will be reflected in a specific behavior in the future. Thus, it was interesting to study young people's attitudes towards Vocational and Higher Education.

According to the interviews, respondents generally have a positive attitude towards both types of education. They think that education is an essential precondition for employment and, thus, economic well-being. Education also gives a person the opportunity to interact with the public; it allows others to share their experiences and extend their circle of relationships. However, they think that Vocational Education and Training (VET) is more relevant to them because of their socio-economic background than higher education, even though a university degree is considered more prestigious.

"Learning is good in every way; It keeps your mind in shape. People like you more, and you have something to do" (23-year-old female).

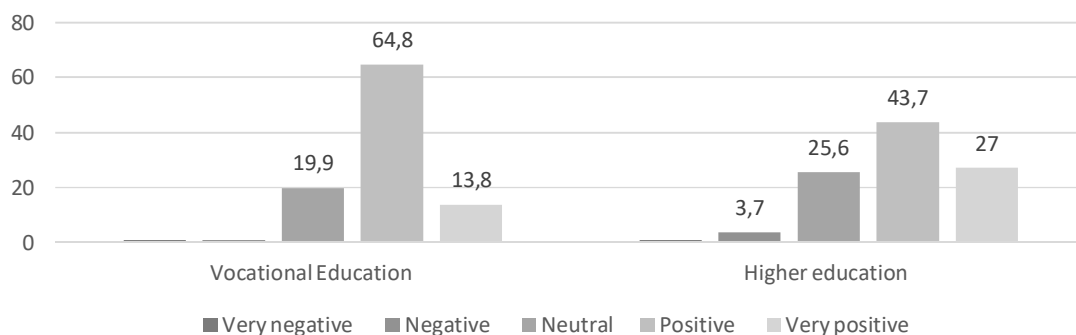
A large proportion of respondents to the survey have a positive attitude towards vocational education (64.8%) and 13.8% felt very positive; the rating on a 5-point scale is 4 (SD=.66).

When evaluating the attitude towards higher education, about 43.7% had a positive attitude towards it and 27.0% were very favorable. The average is 3.90 (SD=.84).

Overall, more young people have positive attitudes towards VET than higher education (78.5 % vs. 70.7%)

Figure 1

Attitudes towards Vocational (VET) and Higher Education



The research identified barriers that prevented young people from continuing their education; this is an important issue given that the majority of respondents negatively evaluate their own decision to drop out of school.

The main barrier identified by 85% of respondents, was the immediate need for paying work, which is why many young people interrupt their education. In their view, working and studying simultaneously is impossible for them, and they prefer working because they require some income. A small proportion of the respondents think it is too late now to continue their studies (6%). Only 9% did not continue their studies due to negative attitudes.

The views expressed in interviews confirm the same:

“I needed a job, I had to help my family due to my family circumstances. My father used to drink all the time, my mother was a cleaner.” (19-year-old female)

Attitudes towards employment are positive, with a rating of 4 (SD=1.9)

“I am willing to take on any kind of job, but there is nothing” (23-year-old male)

As mentioned, many respondents named their family dire economic situation as the primary reason for leaving school. Most respondents (71%) assess their family’s economic situation as problematic or very poor, 20% as average, and others (9%) as good.

Evaluation of the Social Status of NEET Group

Respondents were asked to evaluate the status of the NEET demographic of young people according to three 7-point scales:

Table 2

Young People’s Evaluation of Themselves, other NEETs Youth, and the Young People who Have Continued Their Education

		Evaluation of Self		Evaluation of NEET Peers		Evaluation of Non-NEET Peers	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	Friendly	4.21	0.10	4.00	1.07	3.71	0.96

		Evaluation of Self		Evaluation of NEET Peers		Evaluation of Non-NEET Peers	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2	Happy	5.15	10.01	3.81	1.05	4.0	0.88
3	Optimistic	3.70	1.01	3.34	1.00	3.79	0.85
4	Popular	3.71	1.01	3.43	1.18	3.78	0.91
5	Active	3.90	0.9	3.81	1.0	3.88	0.9
6	Able to take initiative	3.81	0.02	3.62	1.10	3.72	0.97
7	Wealthy	3.41	0.99	3.51	1.01	3.61	0.92
8	Talented	3.50	1.14	3.51	1.03	3.87	0.81
9	Educated	3.40	.09	3.40	.96	3.85	0.86
10	Successful	3.21	0.96	3.31	.97	3.72	0.95
11	Independent	3.51	1.03	3.72	1.15	3.6	1.16
		3.77	1.5	3.59	1.04	3.78	1.14

1. Inferior status - superior status
2. Undesirable status - desirable status
3. Not appreciated in the community - appreciated in the community

The average evaluation was 2.03 (scores by scales, 2; 2 and 2.1), showing a low status for the young people.

“Do you know how it is? Such people are nowhere! You are nothing! Neither at school, nor with friends, nor with co-workers. They cannot even meet people! Where should they meet? They are home mostly surfing the internet or playing video games; they rarely go out in the neighborhood, and that is it.” (21-year-old male.

Social Identity of NEET youth

Participants were asked to rate themselves, their NEET and non-NEET peers alongside peers who decided to continue their studies at college the level on the same eleven scales, with 7-points in the study. The results showed that participant Youth consider themselves more friendly, happy, and able to take initiative than other 2 groups (NEETs group and youth who continued study) and more optimistic and popular than the NEETS groups, while they think non-NEET groups are more wealthy, talented, educated, and successful (see Table 2).

The average self-esteem is more favorable than that of NEETs peers, but less positive than that of peers who continued their academic studies.

Young people’s social identity is closer to the non-NEETs group (0.01) than the NEET peers (0.18).

Happiness and Well-being

Respondents were asked to choose one of the seven positive and negative emotions that most accurately expressed their current attitude towards their own lives.

The answers were distributed: very happy – 41.3%; happy – 31.3%, neutral – 23.5% l, unhappy –1.3%, very unhappy – 2.6%.

Participants have high self-esteem out of a maximum of 40 points ($M = 30.92$; $SD=3.45$)

“Hopefully, I will get a job one day and will have my own salary; I am not the worst in the world “ (23-year-old male).

One-fifth (19.5%) of the respondents were satisfied with their own life, while 26.1% were very dissatisfied, and more than half (54.6%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In the Georgian population within this age range, 18-24, previous researchers determined that 25.1% were satisfied, while 57.1% are felt neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and a remaining 17.8% were dissatisfied (Sumbadze et al., 2012). The average score on life satisfaction scale is 2.4 ($SD=1.2$), showing low level of life satisfaction.

A maximum well-being score can be 200 (40 self-esteem X 5 life satisfaction), while the research participant's score is 120.59 (30.92 self-esteem X 3.9 life satisfaction) is slightly higher than an average score.

“How can I be satisfied with my life? I am not satisfied with my appearance, employment, finances, economic condition, education, achievements! I have healthy children, thank God, but what else?” (23-year-old female.)

Only 39 % of all respondents believe that their life outcomes will be in accord with their ambitions and goals, showing a lack of perceived control over their lives.

Table 3

Correlations Matrix among the Main Variables (n=380)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-esteem					
2. Life satisfaction	.624				
3. Well-being	.946**	.498**			
4. Social identity	.244**	.247**	.008		
5. Happiness	.242**	.223**	.183*8	.415**	
6. Family economic status	.316**	.188**	.242**	.170**	.065

** Correlation is significant at the level of .01 (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the level of .05 (2-tailed)

A positive correlation was identified between well-being, self-esteem ($r=.946$, $p <.01$); and life-satisfaction ($r=.498$, $p <.01$) that was expected as self-esteem and life satisfaction determine well-being.

Social identity is also positively correlated with self-esteem ($r =.244$; $p <.05$) and life satisfaction ($r =.247$ $p <.05$).

As table 3 shows, with increased happiness people's self-esteem also rises ($r=.242$; $p <.01$); they are satisfied with their life ($r =.223$; $p <.01$), have higher well-being ($r =.183$; $p <.01$), social identity is shared with non-NEET youth ($r =.415$; $p <.01$).

Family economic status is positively and significantly correlated with life satisfaction ($r =.183$; $p <.05$), as well as influencing self-esteem ($r =.316$; $p <.05$); The same can be said about the correlation of family economic status with well-being ($r =.242$; $p <.05$) and social identity ($r =.170$; $p <.05$).

Escaping of Youth from the Status of NEET

Most of the respondents regretted dropping out of school and accordingly, about 43.1 % of the surveyed youth want to continue their education in VET, 6.1% hope to enroll in college or university, 13.1% think about participating in various training opportunities; 2.7% do not want to study anymore. Other respondents (42.0%) would not answer or were undecided.

The young people who want to continue their education are, on average, 22.16 years old ($SD = 3.58$; 18-29), a slightly older age group than the respondents who do not want an education, whose average is 21.78 ($SD = .09$; 18-29). A sector of 15.5% of respondents answered that they have a very good or quite good economic situation; while 67.7% evaluate their own economic condition as average; this group of youth has lower self-esteem (29.5 Vs. 32.34; $F=9.32$; $p<.05$), but they are happier (3 vs. 2.2; $F=9.32$; $p<.05$) and have more positive attitudes than the demographic group who do not want to continue education (4.44 Vs. 4.20 $F=10.500$; $p<.05$). Young people who want to continue their education evaluate their decision more incorrectly than young people who do not (65% and 60%; Chi-square = 8.384; $p <.05$).

There was a link between the desire to pursue vocational education and the perception of unemployment; 70% of respondents who want to continue their education in VET think that the main reason for their unemployment is lack of job qualifications (Chi-square = 18.639; $p <.05$).

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to identify if various factors significantly predicted young people's desire to escape from the NEETs group.

A desire to leave the NEETs group was considered as the dependent variable, while among the dependent variables were age, gender, attitudes towards education, attitudes towards education and employment, social identity, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, perceived control in life, and family economic status.

The overall regression was statistically significant ($R^2=.956$; $R=.978$) $F = 583.024$; $p<.01$. Analysis indicated that predictor variables significantly predicted the dependent variable. Self-esteem, social identity, attitude towards education and employment, and family economic background showed positive predictive values.

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis in Predicting Individual Intention to Escape from NEETs Group

	β	t	p
Self-esteem	24.47	58.280	<.01
Social identity	7.68	5.11	<.01
Attitudes towards education	6.84	2.65	<.01
Attitudes towards employment	6.44	2.45	<.01
Family economic status	5.735	3.85	<.01

Discussion

The majority of young people noted that their family's dire financial situation was the main reason for dropping out of school after receiving just a basic level of education. Financial need causes many young people to leave school prematurely and start a job in order to earn an income, although they could find a steady job, and their only work opportunities were short-term, low paying and inconstant.

Most of the students decided to drop out independently without considering parents' wishes, teachers' advice or career guidance specialist suggestions. However, they did not have relevant labor market information about available employment opportunities and lacked the job skills to achieve their goals. Thus, young people had to make uninformed decisions. They could not consider significant risks, downsides, or consequences in advance. These findings are relevant to other research that showed that youth in Georgia terminate their education primarily because of their family's pressing economic need, and have to make uninformed decisions (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

Vocational and career planning courses offered to 9th graders informed students of the risks of dropping out, although overall, counseling was limited, thus facilitating uninformed decision-making. The problem of awareness must be solved from the lower levels of the school before the student complete 9th grade. By this point, students should be aware of the benefits of completing general education or vocational education as it affects their employment and career advancement opportunities.

Although they dropped out and lack jobs, most NEETS youth still attach an overall positive value to learning and employment. Their attitudes are especially positive towards vocational education as they consider it more relevant to their economic background than higher education. Analysis showed that the following factors contribute to the desire to continue education: self-esteem, attitudes towards education, attitudes towards employment, social identity, and family economic status. One of the main factors underlying the decision to continue education is a positive attitude towards vocational education and employment, which can be easily explained based on the theory of planned action (Ajzen, 1991). According to the theory, the main factors of intentional behavior are the attitude towards the behavior and the subjective norm. If a person does not encounter an obstacle that he cannot overcome, the intention is to trigger the appropriate behavior. In our case, such obstacles are institutional and situational barriers to education. By overcoming them, this group of young people is expected to continue their education and eliminate the group of NEETS. The survey reveals that many respondents who regret their decision to drop out want to continue their education, and about 1/3 had made no final decisions.

The same can be said about the attitudes towards employment that are also positive. A need to find employment forced the youth to leave school prematurely, but because of a lack of jobs or low level of skills and experience, they could not find salaried jobs; moreover, they could not improve their crucial competencies for employment because of resulting educational deficits. Thus, young people have found themselves in a vicious circle whose transcendence is possible only through proper education, like completed secondary, VET or higher education which is necessary for finding employment and professional development, career advancement, and integration into society.

The surveyed youth negatively perceive the status of NEET. According to other research, approximately 65.5% of the respondents who left education after grade 9 belong to the NEETS (do not pursue studies nor do they work) group (Kitiashvili et al., 2016). This group of youth is vulnerable, and their numbers are significant in Georgia. In 2016, among the youth aged between 15 and 29, a total of 26.6% were NEETs, (Household Survey Data, 2016), while in developed countries this rate averages at 15.5%.

The results showed that NEETs evaluate themselves as more friendly, happy, and able to take initiative than the groupings of NEETs and non-NEET peers, and more optimistic and popular than NEETS groups. Respondents believe that peers who have continued their education are more wealthy, talented, educated, and successful than they. The results showed that the social identities of the surveyed youth were closer not to the NEET group, but to their non-NEET peers. When young people identify with a particular group, they share group-related evaluation criteria.

Research has shown that NEET youth typically use psychological mechanisms, such as identifying with a positively assessed non-NEET group, to maintain high self-esteem or use individual mobility strategies to escape from an underprivileged social group that can be considered as a novelty of this research. Analysis showed that the following factors contribute to the desire to continue education: self-esteem, positive attitudes towards education and employment, social identity, and family economic status.

NEETs are associated with diminished well-being mainly because of their lower life satisfaction. NEET youth scores lower than the general population in life satisfaction, although they display a similar level of self-esteem.

The high NEET rate in Georgia suggests that NEETs youth should be a particular target group for interventions. Escape through upward mobility from the NEETs group is not only a consequence of individual or family factors but depends upon the influence of higher education and labor-market systems. Access to training and/or retraining represents the key strategic focus; in addition, NEET youth face challenges during the school-to-work transition, there is a lack of available job opportunities on the market, frustrating those who continue to search for steady employment and even discouraging those who might consider continuing their education and training. These young people require special attention from policymakers to enable their 'activation' in the labor market and thus empowering more individuals to leave the NEETs group. It is essential to activate this group of young people, to offer them evening courses, weekends, helpful information, and career counseling to help them return to education.

Providing practical career guidance is essential to supporting pupils during transition periods. Career guidance services, that are available in some schools in Georgia, should be available in every school. Young people need to have tailored, intensive support through easily accessed career guidance measures. It is important to successfully calibrate the factors identified in the current research that, as motivations, contribute to individual upward mobility away from NEET groups, such as increasing one's self-esteem, social identity, attitudes towards education and employment, and family economic status.

It is impotent to introduce policies to help young people to continue vocational education in order to acquire the skills and qualifications for sustainable employment in the future, or to support study within integrated programs when young people can get vocational education in parallel with general education. By the end of their secondary education, young people will thus have VET qualifications and enjoy a better opportunity to integrate within the labor market, or they can continue their study at higher education

It is possible to successfully share the best practices and successful experience of some countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Slovakia) to promote youth entrepreneurship and self-employment. Entrepreneurship is a priority in Georgia, although it is still in the early stages of development. Young people who want to start their own business should be provided with special services to promote alternative pathways in the country's developing economy. Another measure is to provide financial support mechanisms for continued school attendance in the form of subsidies (in Poland), free school meals, allowances, and scholarships (available in Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Slovakia) (Mascherini, 2020).

Using proactive measures is especially important to protect vulnerable young people from becoming NEETs. Here, too, Georgians can successfully adopt other member states' experience of using various measure, including measures aimed at identifying potential early school dropouts, policies focusing on specific vulnerable geographical areas, the provision of alternative learning environments, and increased career guidance or personal assistance, with the aim to create financial support mechanisms and greater parental engagement (Mascherini, 2020).

Conclusions and Implications

The research shows that one of the main reasons for becoming a NEET youth is terminating one's education, and subsequent challenges related to finding steady employment. Research shows that students started thinking about dropping out of school over the last 1-2 years of general education and did not instantly decide, though most ultimately made uninformed decisions. Accordingly, only 1/3 of the respondents think they made the right decision, while the rest regret that they dropped out of school and think they should not have rushed to make a decision.

Barriers to continuing education were mainly situational, over which the respondents themselves had little control. According to their subjective assessment, their individual family's dire financial situation was a decisive factor in pushing them to leave school prematurely, and try to find immediate, paying work. Only a small number of students attributed their early termination of studies to a lack of interest in learning and/or personal laziness.

Most NEETS youth have positive attitudes towards education and employment. About 1/3 of the surveyed youth want to continue their education through vocational education.

NEET has an inferior social status that is neither desirable nor appreciated, thus young people want to escape from this status. One of the novelties of this research is that the social identities of the surveyed youth were closer not to the NEET group, but to their non-NEET peers. NEETs are associated with diminished well-being mainly because of their lower life satisfaction. NEET youth have lower scores than the general population in life satisfaction, although they display a similar level of self-esteem. The following factors contribute to the desire to continue education: self-esteem, attitudes towards education, attitudes towards employment, social identity, and family economic status.

NEETs youth should be a particular target group for interventions in Georgia based on the best international experience.

34 Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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