

NEETs' CHALLENGE TO JAPAN: CAUSES AND REMEDIES

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Abstract: Based on a questionnaire survey and an interview, with additional support from reviews of literature and archival information, this paper examines the underlying causes of the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) problem in Japan. Those who responded to the survey were senior-grade students from middle schools, high schools, junior college and university, and a group of opinion leaders, who have no direct experience as freeters or NEETs. Findings from the survey suggest that individual personality attributes such as dislike of and inability to adapt to things and situations, over-sensitivity etc. which arise from and are exacerbated by unfavorable family, school, social, and workplace related circumstances, with further negative influences from the economic environment and metamorphic social changes, have given rise to the problem of NEET. The issue has posed a severe challenge to the nation's labor market, and calls for an immediate solution. The paper offers some inductive and deductive suggestions to eradicate the underlying causes of the problem and arrest its further escalation and prevent recurrence.

1. INTRODUCTION: NEET AND THE JAPANESE LABOUR MARKET¹

The term “Not in Employment, Education or Training” (NEET), first used in the analysis of British labor policy in the 1980s to denote people in the age brackets of 16–18 who are “not in employment, education, and training”, was adopted in Japan in 2004, and its meaning and essence were modified to fit into the social and labor market circumstances (Kosugi 2005a: 7–8; Wikipedia 2005, Internet). The term NEET is defined mainly in four sources: Government policy, private/public think tanks, programs and activities relating to NEET problems, and academic research, and it is difficult to differentiate between these definitions. Combining elements of many such sources (e. g. Kosugi 2005b: 2–7; Hori 2005a: 26–48; Wada 2005: 16), a comprehensive definition is developed as follows. NEETs refer to young and unemployed people at different phases of transition (school-to-school, school-to-work, or work-to-work), who are trying to find but

¹ This paper cites statistical information from research and archival sources without sufficient references. Such information can be found in other research also. However, this does not influence the objective of this paper.

are unable to find work. Some are not searching for work at all, while others can be categorized as “jobless youth”. Nevertheless they can be included in a category as a prospective or active labor force. Such people do not attend schools nor help in household activities, thus they fall in the category of NEETs. NEETs also refer to those youths who do not engage in any type of employment after leaving school and belong to the “non-labor force” population in the age group of 15–34, but excludes married women. The trend towards NEET is most visible among relatively less educated and young people from low-income households (Kosugi 2005a: 6), but it does exist among young people from well-to-do families. Based on information in the public archival documents and on recent research, Kosugi (2005b: 5–20) analyzes size, gender, age, education, child-parent relationships, job expectations, and other features and attributes of NEETs in Japan.

Genda (2005: 2–3) defines “jobless people” as those non-working people who neither attend school, nor are married, nor work for earnings or remittance. These “jobless people” are of two types, “job seeking” and “non-job seeking”. The former is willing to work and search for work, while the latter has no disposition to do so. Genda calls this group a “discouraged (jobless) group”. NEETs, in his account, are the non job-seeking, discouraged segment of the jobless population. It refers only to single-people. As opposed to the situation in the UK and USA where NEETs are recent school leavers in the 16–18 age group, in Japan they belong to the 15–34 age group.

NEET is not a problem peculiar to the labor market or labor force in Japan; indeed it is (was) present everywhere in the world. In the UK, as of 2003, 24.5 percent of the population in the 16–18 age group were not in education nor training; 9.0 percent of them were classified as NEET (JIPLT 2005b: 16). Even in the USA, the proportion of 16–18 year old NEETs had increased from 8.5 percent in 1999 to 9.0 percent in 2001 (Weinstock 2005, Internet). But NEETs in Japan have different attributes from those in the other countries, and Kosugi (2005c) defines them in four categories, namely the *yankee*-type; *hikikomori*-type (reclusive or unsociable), *tachisukumi*-type (fear paralyzed) and *tsumazuki*-type (stumbled), and regards them as Japanese-style NEETs. The first type, in her view, is antisocial but seeks pleasure; the second is unable to build social relationships and remains confined at home; the third is overly conscientious in job-hunting but ultimately breaks down after failure; and the fourth is the job quitter who finds employment, yet soon quits, loses confidence after a while, and then plunges into despair (Wikipedia 2005, Internet). Wada (2005: 19–22) defines NEETs in five types, namely reluctance to assume responsibility, socially reclusive, parasite single, ambition indifferent and family ruining.

Hori (2005a: 26–48) observes the locus of some NEETs as “life back and forth between *arubaito* and NEET”, and based on the study of their social networks classifies them into “limited” and “isolated” social network groups. The former group includes males with less education, residing in tightly knit local communities, and the latter, females in the areas where job opportunities are limited and males in both rural and urban areas who possess more formal education. Many other categorizations can be made and found which, however, have little to do with the existence of NEETs and associated problems for society.

NEET as a term gained rapid popularity in Japan after the publication of the “White Paper on Labor Economy 2004” by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) in September of the same year (Wada 2005: 16). However, the White Paper did not use the term straightforwardly, and it appeared in a later analysis of the labor situation by its adjunct agency, the Japan Institute of Labor Policy and Training (JILPT: 2004a). Mass-media, researchers, tabloids, newspapers, and non-profit voluntary social organizations (NPOs) made it popular and ultimately a buzz word.

Jobless or unemployed, freeter, *arbeiter*, part-timer, and NEET need attention since they represent different faces of the active labor forces and job market conditions, in other words, the robustness of the national economy. As opposite to employed (employed by others and self-employed), “jobless” in Japan connotes those who are completely unemployed, while *arbeiter*, freeter, and part-timer are in jobs, though the length and nature of employment, compensation package, and other terms and conditions vary. Short-or part-time employment includes all those who work fewer than 35 hours a week, but excludes those in full-time or tenured employment and who fall within the traditional system of lifetime employment and retire at the statutory or mandatory retirement age of 60–65 (JILPT 2004b: 36 and 39). This group works 40 hours (plus or minus according to national/international labor standards) a week in full employment. On the other hand, unemployed means “people 15 years old and over who are able to work, have sought work, and are out of work... and includes people who are waiting for results of job searches” (JILPT 2004b: 47). Economically active labor force means people aged 15 years and over, and according to this definition, in 2003 the active labor force was 66.66 million or 52.2 percent of the national population, of which 5.3 percent were unemployed (JILPT 2005a: 14). From the “Labor Force Survey of 2002”, it is evident that NEETs are “detached from the labor force”, and thus can be included in the “non-labor force” segment of the population (Kosugi 2005d: 2).

The definitions provided by the Japanese government, scholars, and others all together show that Japanese NEETs are different from those in

other countries, especially the UK, in terms of age – 16–18 vs. 15–34; family status – married vs. single; schooling – recent school leavers vs. both fresh and old school leavers and graduates; attitude to work – looking for a job vs. not looking for a job and general trend – irregular increase vs. sharp increase. Age as a differentiating factor automatically leads to difference in the level of education. In Japan a NEET can be a college graduate, while in the West the possibility of a college graduate being in NEET is very low, although it cannot be ruled out as absolutely nil. The UK NEETs are the outcome of an uncontrollable “hierarchical social structure” where children from underprivileged families, communities, and regions are more prone to becoming NEETs, whereas the Japanese NEETs are regarded as one by-product of the “changing social structure” in the 1990s and of this century (Genda 2005: 4).

NEETs in Japan, in fact and as seen above, are “discouraged people” and include unsuccessful job seekers, job quitters, job losers, and a group who does not have a knack for jobs. Of the NEETs one group “does not work” (*hatarakanai*) intentionally, and the other “cannot work” (*hatarakenai*) due to ambition and loss of morale. The age limit of 34 in Japanese-type NEETs is also questionable, since the mandatory (statutory or official) retirement age is 60–65 years, which implies that under normal circumstances one will work at least up to this age and even longer as society ages. Under these social circumstances, what will be the situation of a person if he or she does not surmount the walls of NEET and exceeds the age limit of 34, is a big and unaddressed issue. Second is the question of the so-called “*bocchan(s)*”, children born with silver spoons in their mouths who possess all the facilities, qualifications and attributes to become “active” members in the “active labor force”, but do not do that for any obvious reasons. Thirdly, even during the golden period of development and employment in the 1970s and the 1980s, the national job separation (quitting for any reason) rate for all ages was about 22 percent, and that varied from 25–35 percent for people in the age groups of younger than 20 and 20–24 (Shimada 1985: 8–11). The economy was in boom, the quitters could manage jobs easily, but the market was not as flexible as it is today to welcome the mid-career employment seekers. Some might have turned to NEETs, but society was not aware of that. This proposition, if proved, will nullify the claim that NEET in Japan is (was) an outcome of the social transformation in the 1990s and the current decade (Genda: 2005)

Throughout the 1980s to the present, Japanese economy and society have undergone many transformations and crises. With selective adoption of the best practices from other parts of the globe, problems and bad practices have been parodied. The *kyouikumama* (education-conscious mother) and “workaholic father” have changed tremendously. Vis-à-vis

this fact of the past, prolonged recession in the post-bubble period since the 1990s brought new upheavals in the name of structural adjustment of the economy, employment market, social security, welfare, and privatization of the public sector. NEETs, hitherto overlooked, have come to the forefront of national agendas. Aging of the nation, decline in the population of 18-year-olds, and retirement of the baby boomers have brought new impetus to review and analyze the outlook of national labor forces. NEET is an overlooked problem of this time, and it seems to rock the whole of society if all the freeters turn to NEETs or their number continues to grow. This paper will examine the underlying causes of NEET especially, and pinpoint some suggestions to stop its recurrence and expedite its eradication.

2. SIZE OF THE NEET POPULATION

NEET as a national problem, at the moment, is extremely mysterious; neither the number nor the underlying causes are adequately understood and the remedies and antidotes are yet to be discovered. Every NEET has syndromes and circumstances peculiar to him or herself. Freeters and others who work may become NEETs, but the possibility of the reverse is still very rare and cannot be asserted with confidence. As of 2002, the size of the NEET population ranged from 650,000 to 850,000 (Kosugi 2005c – derived from the government statistics) or was 847,000 (Genda 2005 – derived from his definition), and it is constantly on the rise. Rengo (Japanese Federation of Workers Union) estimates NEETs at 640,000 and freeters at 21,300,000 (Rengo, Internet), and it satirically calls the current labor turn over situation “7–5–3 Syndrome”, which means 70 percent of middle school, 50 percent of high school, and 30 percent of university graduates quit jobs and turn to freeters, increasing their numbers by approximately 100,000 each year. This means the freeter-cum-arbeiter and NEET population will increase further unless preventive measures are adopted immediately. Rengo estimates the unemployment rate at 10 percent in 2005, while the government estimated it at 5.3 percent in 2003 (JILT 2005b: 14). According to the government, the unemployment rate in new graduates was 5.6 percent in 1990, and that had hovered around 20 percent since 1999 (MHLW, internet). Statistics provided by universities and other academic institutions are deceptive since those do not exactly show the number of unsuccessful job-hunting graduates, who in many cases resort to such alternatives as supporting family businesses, research student (*kenkyūin* and *kenkyūsei*), studying abroad, repeating the last academic year (*ryūnen*), and other similar procrastinating measures. Therefore, the de-

gree of reliability of the officially provided job statistics is questionable. Economics in theory accepts a rate of about 5 percent unemployment as full-employment in any economy, and in a situation where the 18-year-old population is declining in Japan, freeter and NEET should not be of much concern, but can be accommodated in the job market. The crux of the situation in Japan, however, is that on one hand, the problem was long overlooked and, on the other hand, the possibility of returning the NEETs to employment or education is very slim under the existing circumstances.

2.1. Research Objectives

This research addresses one basic question: What are the factors that make someone a NEET. There is plenty of research on the topic, but most of the authoritative research was done on the basis of public archival data, field surveys on the activities of youth support centers, interview surveys of youths in trouble during transitional phases and their relatives, and internet questionnaires. This research takes a different approach to understanding the causes that lead to NEET from people who are approaching or are on the eve of “education to working life transition phases at schools”, and do not possess practical experience of being NEETs or freeters. These people are believed to be thrilled and excited at entering into a new phase of life, and do not yet possess a disturbing image of the complex social circumstances. Secondly, the research aims to come up with inductive and deductive suggestions on how to approach the issue of NEET to reduce its further growth, arrest its recurrence, and decrease its seriousness, although in reality NEET is part and parcel of human society and of any nation.

2.2. Research Methodology and Organization

This research was planned by the author in September 2005 with a view to examining the causes of the NEET problem in Japan. The study is heuristic in approach in that it aims to explore the causes with people at transitional phases and in practical fields of work, and to add new knowledge to the understanding of the issues of NEET. This will ultimately constitute the basis of further research and help policy-makers and activists develop plans and programs to fight the issues and effects of NEET. The samples consist of 71 people from four groups of students from middle school (MS Group), high school (HS Group), junior college (JC Group), and university (U Group), and a group of people with knowledge in different fields (KP

Group). Their breakdown is 25 (35.2 percent), 8 (11.3 percent), 12 (16.9 percent), 15 (21.1 percent), and 11 (15.5 percent), respectively. The KP Group is composed of teachers from schools and colleges, company owners, and retired/working senior people, who are thought to be knowledgeable on the causes of NEET and similar other issues in Japanese society. All the students are in the upper grades of their respective institutions, will join the labor market this Spring (2006) or next Spring (2007), and thus have personal experience of transitions in schools/ages and direct knowledge of the employment market. It is assumed that the sample individuals are very familiar with the anatomy and sociology of the current employment market, and are aware of the people of their age who may become NEET, freeters, arbeiter, and members of other less-prestigious segments of the working population.

Although it was planned to keep both genders in the sample, the numbers were not taken into account to avoid bias in the analysis of findings. Questionnaires were sent to and collected from the respondents through their teachers, but their names and other particulars were not recorded. The KP Group filled in their questionnaires, and the author interviewed some of them personally and on the telephone for their critical opinions and suggestions on the issues. However, interviews were not conducted with any members of the student groups. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were thus ensured.

The questionnaire had two sections with seven sets of questions with multiple choice-answers. The student-groups gave answers to six sets of questions, and the KP Group to all seven sets. The questionnaires were developed in Japanese, and the interviews were also conducted in Japanese. The KP Group is well known to the author and the question of response rate was not a matter of serious concern. Respondents were given scope to express their personal opinions with open-ended questions in each section. This method was planned with the assumption that neither students nor KPs are themselves NEETs, but they know about the situation, and their responses will be frank and free from personal feelings and emotions of the NEETs and people associated with them.

The method of analysis is simple; calculation/tabulation of frequencies/percentages of responses to the factors in each set of questions. Although it can be argued that findings from such methods can be subjective or crude, the author thinks them reliable since it is an indirect approach to discovering the causes of NEET from people who are not NEETs. However, some questionnaires were scrapped due to technical errors in answering. Information obtained from questionnaires and interviews is supplemented by information from archival sources such as statistical documents and web sites of government agencies and private bodies, NPOs, newspaper/internet clippings, and findings from existing research.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS²

As mentioned above, it is next to impossible to come up with a set of universal or common factors that lead to NEET since each NEET has his/her own conditions. Factors can be grouped as micro (individual/family), meso (school/employment/sub-national block), and macro (nation and society). Micro (individual specific) factors are generic of meso factors, which are in turn generic of macro factors, but the interaction between these three groups of factors takes place in both directions – micro↔meso↔macro. So that the sample individuals could understand them easily, we quoted them in the questionnaires as individual, family, educational institution, employment organization, national economy and social factors. For simplicity and also because of the heuristic nature of this research, we did not attempt to reorganize them into sub-groups.

Personality Attributes of NEETs

Personality, in-born, nurtured and developed out of experience, is a decisive factor that circumscribes one's attitude toward life, family, education, job and society. The samples pointed out the most important 10 attributes/characteristics out of the specified 15, and added more which they perceived as leading people to NEET (Table 1). According to the MS Group, the most important personality attributes are lack of willingness to work (84 percent), dislike of the formal work environment (68 percent), inherent short-temper (68 percent), over-sensitiveness (44 percent), and inability to adjust (36 percent). It is interesting to see that all student groups irrespective of institutions consider lack of willingness to work, short temper and inability to adjust the three most important factors that can be found in the personality of the NEETs. The KP Group, on the other hand, pointed out lack of adjustability (100 percent) as the most important factor, and timid nature (67 percent), over-sensitiveness (67 percent), and lack of willingness and family problems (both 45.5 percent) as secondary possible causes.

² Although we gave many alternative choices in the questionnaire, some were not marked at all by the respondents. We excluded those from the tables. On the other hand, some respondents cited factors in the free opinion columns, and we took some of those factors cited very often. Therefore, the number of factors mentioned in tables may not always match with the numbers mentioned in the text of the paper.

Attributes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Weak personality	20.0	50.0	8.3	40.0	27.3
Incapable of adjusting	36.0	62.5	41.7	66.7	100
Inherently fickle minded	24.0	12.5	25.0	33.3	27.3
Inherently short tempered	68.0	12.5	41.7	73.3	18.2
Dislike of formal work environment/life	68.0	87.5	75.0	66.7	45.5
Craving for loving partner	20.0	0	8.3	13.3	0
Suffering from family problem	24.0	37.5	16.7	33.3	45.5
Negative attitude to life due to loss of parent	28.0	12.5	16.7	33.3	36.5
Apparently capable but lacking ambition	24.0	75.0	16.7	46.7	63.6
Lack of desire to work	84.0	70.0	83.3	100.0	54.5
Absence of someone to love and take care of	28.0	25.0	0	6.7	27.3
Afraid to discuss problems with others	32.0	25.0	41.7	40.0	54.5
Tender hearted but oversensitive	44.0	25.0	33.3	26.7	54.5
Others (inability to take pleasure in work, etc.)	12.0	12.5	8.3	13.3	0

Table 1: **Personality Attributes Leading to NEET (in percent).**

Note: MS stands for Middle School, HS for High School, JC for Junior College, U for University and KP for Knowledgeable People.

Family Related Factors

The first and foremost place of affinity for an individual is the family/home where he or she was born and brought up, and which constitutes the eternal source of love, affection, respect, care, and other psychological needs and cravings. Out of the 20 heterogeneous factors in the questionnaires that can be associated with one's family situation and be perceived to develop into NEET, the respondents were asked to select the most important 15. The responses are summarized in Table 2.

The MS Group attaches importance to parents' divorce/separation and overly lenient upbringing or *amae* (both 60 percent), parents' over-reliance on school and reluctance to bring up their children, a feeling in children to afford with parents' savings and lack of association with relatives (all 52 percent), parents' loss of job due to corporate restructuring, irresponsibility in taking care of children for no obvious reason (both 48 percent), and both parents' work leading to inadequate attention paid to children (44 percent) as causes leading to NEET. The HS Group shows almost a similar pattern, but adds poor relationship between parents and lack of socialization (both 50 percent) to the list. The JC Group, in addition to the factors mentioned by the MS Group, adds more factors like parents' "better to overlook" (*hōttokeba yoi*) mentality and irresponsible attitude toward children's career building, while the HS Group adds inadequate parental

mentoring at age and school transition stages (67 percent). It is interesting to note that parental leniency, irresponsibility and inadequate mentoring are considered more important in the judgment of the students at more senior levels at schools/colleges.

The KP Group, who have experience of rearing children/young people, teaching/managing, and dealing with such people under different circumstances, adds overworked parents (64 percent), which leads to inadequate care and monitoring of children’s education and career. This means that, being older, they understand the more practical reasons, while the younger respondents (MS and HS Groups) attribute the problem to a bad situation at home (poor relationship between the parents and a difficult work situation) which degenerates into arrogance towards parental guidance on the part of the children. Called the universal learning institution, a “family” makes an everlasting impression on one’s character, behavior, attitude, and life-style, and is thus very important in molding a physical and mental framework for school, job, and other avenues in life. As families have their own families, the situation continues throughout time and down the generations.

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Both parents work and cannot look after children	44.0	50.0	33.3	26.7	63.6
Due to overtime, father usually comes home late every-day and does not even talk to children	28.0	25.0	25.0	33.3	45.5
Seeing the above, children start hating work	24.0	37.5	33.3	33.3	18.2
Parents divorce leading to school drop-out and apathy to work	60.0	25.0	33.3	33.3	54.5
Bad relationship between father and mother	32.0	50.0	33.3	26.7	45.5
Due to the above, children do not listen to parents’ guidance	32.0	12.5	16.7	20.0	9.1
Parents rely too much on school and do not take adequate care of children themselves	52.0	25.0	66.7	46.7	63.6
Inadequate parental mentoring at adulthood, school and career transition stages	28.0	37.5	33.3	66.7	36.4
Father’s death leading to inability to pay school fees and individual quits school for work	28.0	12.5	16.7	26.7	18.2
Father lost job due to <i>ristora</i> (company down-sizing) and children work to supplement family income	48.0	25.0	25.0	20.0	18.2
Parents’ irresponsible attitude to care of children for no special reasons	48.0	25.0	58.3	60.0	54.5
Parents irresponsible attitude to children’s career building	24.0	50.0	41.3	66.7	54.5
Father assigned to a job in a distant place and cannot take care of children	20.0	0	8.3	13.3	18.2

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Parents overly lenient (<i>amai</i>) to children	60.0	62.5	66.7	93.3	54.5
Children spend parents' savings with a consequent reluctance to work	52.0	75.0	66.7	73.3	27.3
Lack of association with relatives and loneliness in children	52.0	62.5	33.3	20.0	9.1
Lack of socialization with neighbors	28.0	50.0	33.3	26.7	18.2
[<i>Hōtteokeba yoi</i>] mentality of parents "better to overlook"	36.0	50.0	58.3	80.0	36.4
All these lead to the NEET situation	52.0	0	8.3	26.7	18.2

Table 2: Family Related Factors Leading to NEET.

Academic Institution Related Factors

Japanese young people (children, adolescents, and youths), as in any developed and civilized nation, spend the most effective and important time of the day in their academic institutions, where they are exposed to the formal and informal rules, regulations, and disciplines of such institutions, and where they come across people of similar age, teachers, and parents. Even if the day-care centers and kindergartens are left out of consideration, they spend at least nine years completing compulsory education, and 16 years achieving tertiary qualifications, and pass through every age and school related transition before entering into the labor force and the market. These, transfuse attributes and elements in their lives and characters, which is a well-established fact. To understand the effect and impact of the factors related to academic institutions leading to NEET, 25 elements were cited in the questionnaire, with the request to highlight the most important 15. The overall position of the responses is shown in Table 3.

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Adolescents are not interested in education	40.0	87.5	66.7	33.3	54.5
Contents and methods of education are not interesting	44.0	37.5	41.7	53.3	27.3
Dislike of going to school due to family problem	40.0	50.0	33.3	40.0	18.2
Schools seem unpleasant due to bullying from classmates	72.0	50.0	41.7	40.0	36.4
Schools do not adopt timely measures to stop bullying	48.0	25.0	33.3	40.0	18.2
Loss of learning aptitude due to extra-curricular activities	44.0	0	41.3	13.3	36.4
Children move in groups and cannot break away even when there is trouble	8.0	0	8.3	0	0
Group leader is strong and compels others in the group to bully the weaker ones	40.0	50	33.3	13.3	36.4

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Schools handling of problems arising out of group is not adequate	44.0	62.5	33.3	40.0	45.5
Children do not report problems to parents and suffer in silence	52.0	100	58.3	53.3	54.5
Because, if parents contact schools, trouble will escalate and even lead to the pupil not going to school	24.0	25.0	8.3	40.0	9.1
PTA does not consider/exchange opinions on mental problems of pupils	16.0	12.5	8.3	0	36.4
Problems arise from sexual needs typical of adolescence	4.0	12.5	0	20.0	36.4
No mentoring by school at age transition points	4.0	25.0	8.3	33.3	27.3
Lower schools do not counsel young people to help them adjust to senior schools	0	0	0	20.0	18.2
Senior schools do not counsel young people to help them adjust on admission	8.0	25.0	0	26.3	18.2
Teachers are also stressed and cannot pay them adequate attention	16.0	37.5	41.3	13.3	36.4
Parents put pressure on young people to go in for higher studies after compulsory education to save face in society	24.0	62.5	25.0	46.7	45.5
Schools' slow response to provide solutions allows problems to escalate	40.0	25.0	58.3	33.3	18.2
School curriculum is inadequate in instilling the importance of work in young peoples' minds	24.0	75.0	33.3	26.3	54.5
Absence of even an indirect element in school curriculum dealing with NEET issues	28.0	50.0	25.0	66.7	36.4
Inadequate guidance on job hunting at schools	44.0	50.0	33.3	40.0	18.2
Insufficient academic policy at local and national government levels	16.0	25.0	0	20.0	18.2
All these result in alienation, preventing the person from working	28.0	37.5	33.3	46.7	18.2
All these factors make one reclusive/NEET	56.0	12.5	50.0	20.0	36.4

Table 3: School Related Factors Leading to NEET (in percent).

56 percent of the MS Group and 50 percent of the JC Group feel that all the factors somehow affect and lead to NEET, while 47 percent of the U Group and about 30–40 percent of MS, HS, and JC Groups feel that the factors create alienation, and thus the victim cannot get in to work. Even if it is thought that the respondents are not academic nor mature enough to understand the meaning and causes that lead to “alienation”, it is symptomatic that schools that mold and nurture young people for productive careers are places that have an overriding responsibility to deal with problems that can culminate in NEET. According to the MS Group, bullying (72

percent), inability to report to parents (52 percent), insufficient action by schools to deal with bullying (48 percent), uninteresting content and methods of education, extra-curricular activities (*bukatsu*), and inadequate career guidance (all 44 percent) cause problems leading to NEET. To the above, the HS Group adds lack of interest in education (87.5 percent), inability of education to instill a work ethic (75 percent), and the social mind set of parents pushing young people on to higher schools after compulsory education (62.5 percent), while the JC Group thinks that stress suffered by teachers prevents them from paying students adequate attention (41 percent), and the U Group believes the absence of the NEET issue in the curriculum (67 percent) is significant. The KP Group provided findings very similar to those of the JC and U Groups.

The most obvious aspect of the findings in this section is that adolescents dislike education, but that might be caused by bullying, parents forcing them to go to higher schools, and as all groups said, the schools' lack of promptness in handling bullying-related issues and the students' inability to report bullying to parents and schools also aggravate the situation. Education is not always a pleasant thing for young people when they are growing up, and that results not only from the unpopular contents and methods of education, but also from the inter-personal environment on school campuses as well as in society, where the parents' prestige is tied up with the progress their children make at school. Curriculums at school should reflect the needs (skills and others) of society, of the time, of the generation, and most importantly of the job market. Here lies the crux: are the schools adequately designing and revising the curriculum with new elements to satisfy the needs of the market or society in producing adequately knowledgeable human beings or manpower? This is a decisive factor in their products' (graduates') ability to find suitable positions in the employment market.

Work Related Factors

After leaving school campuses at different stages, young people in general go to work in the factory/company environment and within formal legal and market frameworks, bound by the terms and conditions of employment. Although they work in the family business, as *arubaito*, etc. to supplement their parents' contribution to incidental expenses, travel, hobbies, and in the worst case to pay full academic and living costs, and thus acquire a modicum of job related experience, it is not work on a full time basis. Traditionally, Japanese school education is considered less effective for practical situations, and companies offer training and education within their premises and on the job, and thus after a certain time of acquiring

experience within the company and on the job, a new recruit becomes a real “company man or woman” (Khondaker 1997: 141–159). The period from school to new employment and ultimately assignment to a specific job is a crucial one, and this galvanizes and fosters a social relationship which really becomes a barometer of whether they will continue or quit the job.

Since the four groups of respondents are students and presumably possess no job experience, only the KP was asked to choose 15 work related factors from a set of 22. The assumption here is that if young people can adapt to these, they can continue to work or otherwise quit the job, and seek work again with or without further work experience, education, and professional or vocational training. The adaptation process requires support from school and home, and from employers as well. But, failure to provide adequate support in overcoming barriers leads to NEET in the end. The KP Group, composed of teachers, factory owners, and others experienced in practical fields cites two main factors – inability of the young people to adjust to the new work situation (82 percent) and a mistake in choosing the job – as possible reasons for mismatch between personal traits and job requirements, which leads them to quit their jobs and ultimately become NEETs (Table 4). Dislike of *kiken*, *kitanai*, and *kitsui* (dangerous, dirty, and monotonous) jobs, a perception gap concerning school, home and work place, inability to get on with coworkers from other schools, frequent chastisement by superiors leading to psychological damage, assignment of MS/HS/U graduates to the same type of jobs, increasing tendency to unrestricted, massive lay offs during company crises, wrong job assignment, slow business leading to company failure, and company policy to cut employment during the national economic recession (all 45.5 percent) are also accountable for creating NEETs. The third category of elements are inadequate counseling at schools and inexperience/ineptness of employers to accommodate new recruits in the company environment.

Causes	KP
Inadequate counseling by school on work place/life and consequent inability to get accustomed to work life	36.4
Cannot adapt to <i>kiken</i> , <i>kitanai</i> , and <i>kitsui</i> [dangerous, dirty and monotonous] factory site, and leave jobs	45.5
Perception gap concerning school/home and work place, and quit jobs	45.5
Inadequate family support in adjusting to the work place	9.1
Employers keep new workers at work for long hours. They then develop a negative attitude to work, and quit	27.3
Inexperience of employers in socializing the young people and new recruits at the place of work (<i>kaishakanyō</i>)	36.4
Young workers’ failure to adjust to new coworkers from different schools	45.5

Causes	KP
Young people's inability to adjust to the new work situation	81.8
Severe criticism from boss for a petty mistake during training causes them to quit	27.3
Young workers dislike long unpaid overtime work and quit	27.3
Frequent informal chastisement by boss creates psychological damage and they quit	45.5
Leave job even if boss informally gives good advice, taking that as criticism	27.3
Have to work for 8 hours, less time available to play as in school life, and quit work	27.3
Company socializing at weekend creates antipathy to work	18.2
Placing MS, HS, U graduates in the same job erodes pride in achieving higher education, and leave work	45.5
Increasing opportunity of freeing entices young people to leave full time work	45.5
Doing the same job like a robot without any scope for learning, challenge, or promotion makes job uninteresting	18.2
Massive job cuts due to insolvency of factory/company	45.5
Fake recruitment by company to present a favorable impression to the bank etc. in bad business conditions. Company then fires recruits for no reason	18.2
Mistake in choosing the job leads to quitting	72.7
Assignment to wrong job leads to quitting	45.5
All job conditions are good, companies fail due to slow business situation, leading to loss of jobs	45.5
Recession in the economy and mass employment reduction	45.5

Table 4: Work Related Causes Leading to NEET in the Opinion of the KP Group (in percent).

National Economy Related Factors

The national economic conditions are actual determinants of the movement of employment market, and employers carefully observe the ebb and flow of economic conditions, and manipulate their job offers skillfully to remain competitive. It was assumed that people experienced in economic conditions, in other words, the KP Group and students from higher institutions would provide better information on how economic conditions influence the job market, squeeze job offers, and crowd out job seekers, full-time or others, to ensure flexibility in the employment market.

Out of 25 factors, the respondents were asked to choose 15 they perceive as the most important influence on job conditions and which lead many to NEETs. The KP Group points out ineptness on the part of the government in helping schools/people deal with the NEET problem (73 percent); non-existence of social concessions to buoy up unsuccessful people in self-employment (64 percent); incompatible economic and labor policy; long term job-hunting; disregard of the NEET-freeter problem by trade unions (all 54.5 percent); ambiguous labor force categorization; immobility in the labor market; perceiving the job-hopper as a trouble maker; absence of legal compulsion to make freeters full-time; perceiving freeter/seasonal

workers as a safety valve for the labor market (all 45.5 percent); creating a malaise, as a result of which some people either cannot find jobs and become freeters, while some others after loosing jobs become freeters and NEETs. “Hello Work” and other similar supportive institutions cannot provide adequate help to the people seeking their services (45.5 percent); and excessive activity on the part of the mass-media, etc. (45.5 percent) create new mental problems for the jobless, making them NEETs and reclusive.

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Incompatibility between economic and labor policy and failure to foresee the problem	16.0	62.5	33.3	53.3	54.5
Delay on a national level in understanding the problem	56.0	100	50.0	66.7	27.3
Problem understood but delay in making defensive policy	40.0	50.0	41.7	53.3	36.4
Inept governmental guidance to schools/people in general	20.0	37.5	25.0	26.7	72.7
Ambiguous categorization of the labor force and jobs in national labor policies	40.0	37.5	41.7	60.0	45.5
Labor laws/policies lack proper definition of freeter/NEET	20.0	12.5	25.0	53.3	9.1
Labor force survey and employment statistics do not give adequate information on NEET	32.0	37.5	33.3	26.7	18.2
Immobile labor market in the country gives rise to the problem	28.0	25.0	0	26.7	36.4
Lifetime employment, seniority system, lack of mid-career recruitment/job-change cause the problem	24.0	25.0	8.3	13.3	18.2
Job-hoppers not welcomed but suspected to be trouble makers	40.0	37.5	8.3	40.0	45.5
Change of job searching season leads to lengthy search and ultimate disappointment	28.0	25.0	25.0	33.3	27.3
Long job hunting obstructs school education and job-related skill achievement	24.0	12.5	16.7	26.7	54.5
Full-timers' long overtime work restricts scope of employment; government/society overlooks this, and thus few jobs are available in the market	12.0	12.5	8.3	26.7	9.1
No legal provisions to promote freeters to full-time workers; they then unfortunately become NEETs	12.0	25.0	16.7	26.7	45.5
Perception of freeter and seasonal workers as safety valve for the labor market	32.0	75.0	0	26.7	45.5
Problem long disregarded by unions in negotiation with employers	20.0	25.0	25.0	66.7	54.5
<i>Nihon Keidanren</i> (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) and SMEs federations' long disregard of the issue	24.0	37.5	25.0	13.3	36.4

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Mass media/"Hello Work" and similar institutions play inadequate roles in helping out freeters and jobless people	16.0	12.5	16.7	6.7	45.5
Excessive activity on the part of these institutions aggravates the mental state of jobless people	28.0	37.5	41.7	33.3	45.5
Insufficient integration of activities by central and local governments, business chambers, and NPOs	8.0	62.5	33.3	33.3	63.6
Non-existence of social concessions to buoy up failures in self-employment	24.0	37.5	25.0	20.0	63.6
Lack of system to punish willful freeter/NEET/jobless using social security/national health insurance system, etc.	20.0	25.0	16.7	33.3	36.4
<i>De facto</i> mismatch between actual job offers and job demands	12.0	37.5	33.3	20.0	18.2

Table 5: National Economy Related Factors Leading to NEET (in percent).

The U Group puts more emphasis on the delay in understanding the problem at the national level (67 percent) and in realizing a defensive policy (53.3 percent). The JC Group shows similar perceptions. The HS Group blames the delay in understanding the problem at the national level (100 percent) and incompatibility of economic and labor policies intended to anticipate the NEET issue (62.5 percent). This Group, however, believes that freeters and seasonal workers are treated as the safety valve of the labor market, whereas mismatch between actual job offers and job demand create further troubles. The MS Group feels that job-hoppers are suspected to be trouble makers (40 percent). Taking everything into account, the respondents blame national level policies and inadequacy in the adopted counter measures as the main causes of the problem. The labor market as a whole seems to be less friendly to the job-hoppers and mid-career employment.

National Social Factors

Individual, family, school, workplace, economy – all merge into the large institution, the “society”, which combined with its other constituents culminate in norm, attitude, sincerity, behavior, commitment, thinking, and other cultural and anthropological aspects of the nation. In order to understand the negative aspects of the Japanese society which might turn out to be the causes of NEET, we asked the respondents to select the most important 10 factors out of 20, and the results are summarized in Table 6.

The MS Group mentions the important causes as fear of avoidance by neighbors if a member at home is reclusive or *hikikomori* (56 percent), or in

a similar mental state (52 percent); social aspects of not getting a full time job immediately after graduation (48 percent); weak relationship with the extended family and insufficient access to family institutions to relieve hearts (44 percent); inadequate exchange of information between family and school; and sarcasm and teasing which cause psychic breakdown (both 40 percent). The HS Group adds inadequate hospital and mental care facilities (50 percent) and lack of enlightened perception of the social/human problems in an industrialized society (50 percent) to the list of causes which create NEETs; the JC Group includes closed social relationships and reluctance to talk about problems with others (42 percent); and the U Group and KP Group (53.3 percent and 64 percent respectively) cite collapse of traditional vertical social relationships and erosion of mutual parent-child obligations.

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Slang terms among adolescents are cruel and prone to cause psychological problems	28.0	37.5	16.7	20.0	54.5
Sarcastic remarks by seniors/superiors are upsetting and cause morale breakdown	40.0	25.0	33.3	53.3	36.4
Traditional vertical social platform has collapsed and mutual parent-child obligation has eroded	20.0	12.5	33.3	53.3	63.6
Weakening connection with extended family relatives and adolescents	44.0	12.5	41.7	33.3	36.4
Closed social relationships and prevailing attitude of not telling problems to others	24.0	37.5	41.7	80.0	72.7
Concerned about what neighbors will think if a reclusive child is at home	52.0	50.0	41.7	33.3	36.4
A parent becomes <i>tanshinfunin</i> , i. e. leaves family behind to take up a job, and does not take care of his or her children	12.0	0	25.0	13.3	18.2
Compared with the West, inadequate facilities for providing moral support to troubled youths	4.0	0	25.0	20.0	27.3
Fear of avoidance by neighbors if a reclusive (<i>hikikomori</i>) member is known to be at home	56.0	37.5	50.0	53.3	45.5
Family does not give adequate information to the school about a troubled child	24.0	25.0	41.7	46.6	45.5
Lack of environment in which schools can exchange information positively during transition phases	24.0	25.0	33.3	40.0	18.2
Exchange of information as above may obstruct transitions	16.0	12.5	33.3	20.0	18.2
Due to the above, moving to upper schools does not solve problem, but creates new emotional problems	40.0	25.0	33.3	20.0	9.1
Inadequate hospital, community, and mental care facilities	28.0	50.0	16.7	26.3	54.5

Causes	MS	HS	JC	U	KP
Inadequate juvenile delinquent reform centers/expertise	24.0	0	8.3	13.3	18.2
Lack of perception that juvenile delinquent reform centers, professional youth workers etc. are realities of a modern welfare society	24.0	0	8.3	13.3	9.1
Absence of a generally enlightened perception of the human and social problems in an industrialized/developed society	8.0	50.0	8.3	33.3	36.4
Social environment dictates that school leavers will never achieve full time employment if they do not find a job immediately after graduating from school	48.0	50.0	75.0	46.7	36.4

Table 6: **Social Factors Leading to NEET (in percent).**

4. DISCUSSIONS: INDUCTION AND DEDUCTIONS

Genda (2005), Kosugi (2005c), Honda (2005), and many scholars and institutions have widely researched the causes that lead to NEET, and have suggested solutions and counter measures. The above analysis of the answers on the causes of NEET provided by our respondents, seem very similar to those found in other research, although their statuses are different from respondents in other studies. However, our indirect observations shed light on many factors which have been unknown up to now.

1. Personality, inborn or nurtured, is tremendously important for one's attitude to life, livelihood, and work, and it can be seen that NEETs are not willing to work. They feel ashamed of this, and would rather rely on relatives for their livelihood. The family situation of some NEETs might push them into freighting, etc., to support the family if it is in trouble following the parents' death, divorce or loss of job in corporate restructuring, but it is said that the amount an average Japanese household saves was (is) one of highest in the world, and Japan's social security system (schooling, health insurance, and medical facilities) is still better than many developed countries. Likewise, over sensitiveness in the young mind and lack of ability to adjust to new circumstances are not uncommon in other societies. Are these not contradictory to the well-known and revered Japanese national attributes of "vertical social integration", "mutual dependence", "tendency to form close-knit social groups" and "tendency to regard the company as family" which have long been praised as the social foundation of Japan's rapid development? State laws ensure the right to employment, but do not have any measures to impose a penalty if someone willfully remains out of employment. Employment creates value added in terms of good, service, and well-being which are used, plowed back, and

recycled to create further value added. This fact is indeed overlooked by the younger generation in Japan today.

2. Whereas distressing family factors turn people into freeters and NEETs, positive factors such as parents' savings (house, land and bank balance) create a "no work" and "eat and be merry" syndrome facilitated by conscious "leniency" (*amae*) on the part of the parents. Breakdown of the bond within families, the nuclear family, and parents' irresponsible attitude to child rearing are also quite harmful. While Japan needs, as international organizations suggest, to accept 50,000 foreign laborers a year for 20 years or so to sustain its current GNP in the face of a declining labor force and an aging population, it is difficult to believe that there are not sufficient jobs available to arrest the escalation of freeters and other non-regular labor forces. The government should take accurate accounts of the job markets and adopt measures to correct the distorted statistics.

3. Socio-economic circumstances have changed, leading to changes in the employment styles and qualification requirements. Deficiencies do exist, but school curriculums, teaching methods, and facilities are not injuriously sub-standard or obsolete. The employers' priorities, namely eagerness and willingness to work, ability to communicate, dynamism, and ability to get things done are merely subjective standards. More objective standards should be developed to recruit new graduates with the enactment of further legal provisions to automatically promote freeters to permanent positions after the fulfillment of pre-designed conditions. Ohtsu (2006) suggests treating new graduates as fresh job seekers for a certain number of years after graduation, and developing clear employment standards and details on job requirements.

4. In the age of competition, the old traditions of getting onto the elite track of prestigious schools from kindergarten to university and employment with elite corporate groups have imposed a great of pressure on parents to invest huge funds in sending children to cram schools. As a side effect, this has eroded the dedication to education for many young people.

5. Problems at work, as cited above, did prevail in the past and are not absolutely new. Employers or senior workers of the baby-boom generation are workaholic and genuinely want young employees to be serious. The other side of this fact is that people of the post-baby boom generation (*shinjinrui*) have experienced a socio-cultural environment which is different from that of the past, and the nation as a whole has entered into the stage of what Rostow (1960) called "mass-consumption", albeit with upheavals at different points in time in the 1980s and onward. The human and social problems of the post-industrial age have captured youth's mind. Selected adaptation of good things from the outside has turned into a neo-fashion of mere parody. The spirit of the old axiom, "*hatarakazaru*

mono kūbekarazu" [who does not work should be kept off food], has been eroded by parental leniency and overall national short-sightedness.

6. The Japanese labor market has changed tremendously to court the mid-career job-seekers, but this is not yet fully reflected in the practices of the employers. The efforts to raise consciousness and eradicate problems on the part of non-governmental organizations, central and local governments, and business chambers are not sufficiently united to fight the problem effectively.

7. Japanese society is still ambiguous also to its own members. On the social perspective of the issue, astonishingly all sample-groups attributed six most important factors that breed NEETs. These are (a) the social environment of not getting a full time job if not received one right after graduation, (b) collapse of the traditional vertical social relationship, (c) erosion of the spirit of parent-child mutual obligation, (d) few social relationships, (e) attitude of not telling problems to others, and (f) social stigma associated with the presence of a reclusive member (*hikikomori*) in the family. While a) is peculiar to Japan's post-War II economic development, the other points are by and large outcomes of "nuclear family", "compartmentalization in the society", and dispersing of rural society, agglomeration of economic activities in urban bases, and consequently flocking of population to the cities, living behind the family-past. However, it is impossible to perceive and conceive all the physiological and psychological underpinnings of NEETs by one institution or authority. Therefore, a collaborative approach with supports from all quarters and disciplines might produce better results.

Finally, labor policy in Japan must take into account the concepts of underemployment and structural, frictional, cyclical, disguised, hidden, open, voluntary, involuntary, casual, temporary, technological and other forms of unemployment that may prevail in the country, and the circumstances associated with those from the point of view of economic theories and practices. This might reveal a different picture of the labor market which appears so gloomy now.

5. SUGGESTIONS, REMARKS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the author did not make any effort to seek solutions from the respondents, suggestions for solving the issue emerged during interviews with the KP Group. As the proverb goes, "understanding the causes of a problem is half of the solution", this study adds new knowledge to the causes of the NEET problem. Some of the problems at the individual level and at transition points in the family, at school, at work, and in age will be

solved automatically if some of the problems inherent in the economy and society are solved. As mentioned in Honda (2005: 20), the “dysfunctions” inherent in the four social systems—family, school, workplace, and labor market—must be weeded out and thoroughly overhauled which will automatically solve many of the personality and attitude issues. A comprehensive program, encompassing NEETs, NEETs developing into freeters and others, families, schools, employers and worker unions, national and local government institutions, and NPOs (Non Profit Organisations) should be launched immediately.

Setting up social networks amongst the jobless youth and creation of artificial public employment, as Hori (2005a) suggests, would help elevate confidence and motivation levels. Similar networks between schools and youth supporting agencies will help develop and accumulate occupational skills (Hori 2005b: 8). However, activities in youth support centers (job cafe, carrier center, Hello Work, etc.) and NPOs sometimes turn out as counter productive, since these give the impression to the NEETs that they are the subject of experiments. These institutions and mass media should plan their activities with care so that the mental constitution of their targets does not deteriorate further.

The traditional employment system of new graduates has changed in timing, method, and qualification requirement, and companies including the *Nippon Keidanren* (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) put emphasis on abandoning the lifetime employment system. Long job-hunting, for example, from the third grade at the university hampers not only education, but also causes young people to become disheartened if they fail in several attempts at job-hunting. As was the case before 2000, a gentlemen’s agreement between employers, schools, and public bodies may stop would-be graduates starting to search for jobs early and informal early job offers from the employers. In the view of some respondents job related guidance and counseling at schools, chambers of commerce, promoting agencies, and unions are publicity oriented. They should be more result oriented. However, a serious question that needs immediate attention is whether some of these institutions give a negative impression with over-emphasis on privacy, etc. in their promotional activities.

New labor policies and regulations, proactive programs at vocational skill development institutions, and physical facilities to deal with those in need of medical and mental care should be created immediately, and the people involved in those institutions must not forget the delicate nature of the issue while doing their jobs. Perhaps a psychological revolution is needed from all institutions, from the family to the government, to overcome the menace of NEETs and the issues that breed them.

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