

Youth Aspirations and Employment Constraint

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Abstract

Youth employment has become a major socio-economic concern due to changing labour-market conditions, increasing competition and evolving skill requirements. Young individuals often face difficulties in achieving their career aspirations because of limited job opportunities, skill gaps, qualification mismatch and lack of work experience. This study examines the relationship between youth aspirations and employment constraints by exploring the factors influencing career expectations, employment choices and labour-market participation. The research highlights how educational background, skills, economic conditions and employment opportunities shape youth career outcomes. The study emphasises the need for effective skill development, career guidance and inclusive employment policies to support young individuals in achieving sustainable career growth.

Keywords

Youth Aspirations; Employment Constraints; Labour Market; Skill Mismatch; Career Transition

I. Introduction

The transition from education to employment is an important phase in the life of young individuals, influencing their economic independence, career development and social mobility. However, changing labour-market conditions, technological advancements and increasing competition have created several challenges for youth seeking employment opportunities. Many young people experience a gap between their career aspirations and the realities of available jobs due to skill mismatch, limited employment options and changing workplace requirements. These constraints may affect their career decisions, professional growth and future expectations. Therefore, understanding youth aspirations and employment barriers is

essential for developing strategies that enhance employability, improve labour-market participation and create better opportunities for young individuals.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between youth aspirations and employment constraints.
2. To identify major barriers affecting youth career opportunities and labour-market participation.
3. To analyse the role of skills, education and employment conditions in shaping youth career outcomes.

II. NEET Status and the Wider Continuum of Labour-Market Disengagement

An important note to be mentioned here is that the level of disengagement is not captured by the unemployment rate as those young people who are not in the labour force (not looking for or working) are not included in the unemployment rate. This wider population is encompassed by the indicator measuring the proportion of young people in the non-active, non-employment, non-education, non-training situation and this indicator forms an integral part of the background picture for the current analysis as it represents the kind of non-activity, non-employment, non-education, non-training situation the social frustration framework aims to measure. The recent estimates of NEET in India as per ILO and PLFS analysis (disaggregated by area of residence) are provided in Table 1.6 and Figure 1.4..

Table 1.1. NEET Rate among Youth in India, by Area of Residence, 2018 and 2023

Area of Residence	NEET Rate 2018 (%)	NEET Rate 2023 (%)
Rural	32.8	24.6
Urban	26.1	20.7
All-India (15–24 years)	30.8	23.5
All-India, 2024 (ILO estimate)	Not applicable	25.9 (estimated)
All-India, 15–24 years, PLFS 2025 Annual Report	Not applicable	21.0 (2025)
All-India, 15–59 years, PLFS 2025 Annual Report	Not applicable	24.9 (2025)

Source: International Labour Organization estimates as reported in Business Standard (2024), and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025, National Statistical Office, MoSPI, Government of India.

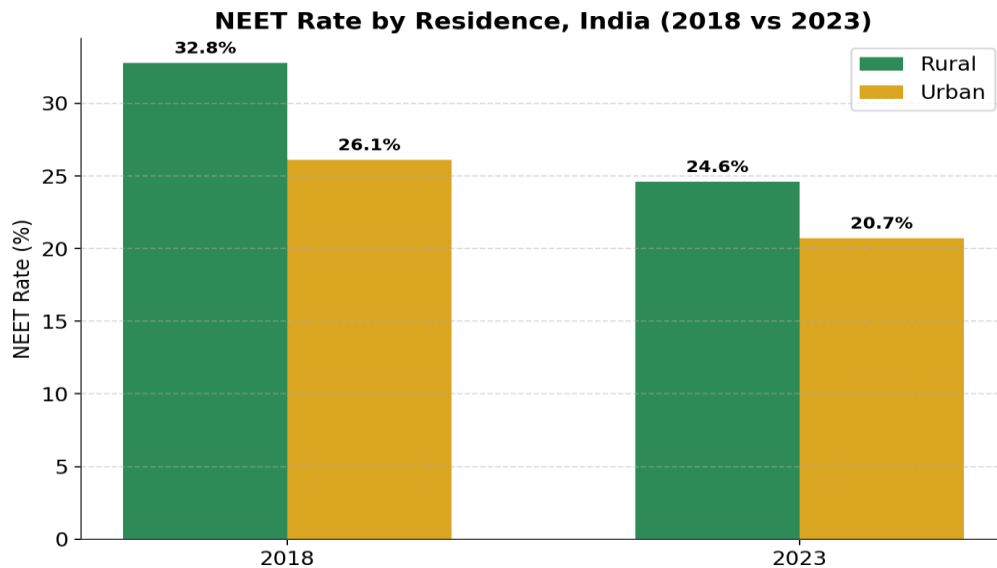


Figure 1.1. NEET Rate by Area of Residence, India (2018 vs 2023)

Source: ILO estimates as reported in Business Standard (2024).

decreased in both rural and urban India over the time period shown, the rural rate of NEETs has always been higher than the urban rate of NEETs, and the difference between the less-educated and highly-educated NEET population is also large, with recent estimates indicating that both less- and more-educated youth are overrepresented in the NEET population relative to those with intermediate educational attainment. This U-shaped association with educational attainment is one possible explanation for the inclusion of the detailed levels of educational attainment and a two-level classification, graduate/non-graduate, in the proposed study as a demographic control.

A recurring theme across all NEET research in the world and in India, is the large gender gap and how this gender gap is explained in the literature, rather than how women actually engage in job seeking. A recent commentary presented using PLFS data, attributes the lack of women in the labour force in India to their responsibility for childcare and homemaking. Recognising that the proposed research will also measure social frustration with regard to blocked labour market goals, gender was used as a demographic control for analysis and the screening section

of the questionnaire was structured to identify non-participation as a discouraged state or as a lack of finding an appropriate job rather than a job with active care-giving roles which is unlikely to be the same sociological phenomenon.

NEET Heterogeneity

There are various population groups in NEET with distinct needs such as unemployed job seekers, the discouraged workers, young person in unpaid care, temporarily not in education/work (TNNEW) for many reasons and with an illness or disability. When they are considered as a single group, it may lead to false explanations. They can all be classified as NEET but, their resources, intent and experiences of frustration will be quite different. It's important to remember that they can all be considered NEET, but they will have a wide range of resources, intentions, and frustrations. This heterogeneity has also been identified as one of the challenges of understanding NEET risk factors by Rahmani and Groot (2023).

The length of time is also crucial. There is a typical lag time between education and work, and that lag time need not have any long-term consequences. Continuous or extended disengagement can lead to loss of skills, diminished networks and altered expectations. It may also make it more likely that the use of a temporary coping becomes more entrenched. The study quantifies and records the time and frequency of exclusion, which is used to determine whether the exclusion is persistent or ordinary. This is in line with systematic evidence that suggests mental-health and social risks are linked to NEET status, and prior disadvantage is a significant contributor to this status (Gariépy et al., 2022; Rahmani et al., 2024)..

Scarring and Cumulative Disadvantage

Scars are events that occur following the first spell of unemployment that create disadvantages. Being out of work early can also limit the amount of experience, slow wage gains, and lessen the competitiveness of subsequent job applications. It also may affect self-confidence and interest in opportunities. Not working following the graduation may not be a direct outcome of graduating; graduation times have been associated with a lagged effect on mental-health costs after the economic recession (Li & Toll, 2021). In some cases, not all respondents may have scars, but it is important to have the employment history and the current employment status measured.

Cumulative disadvantage can be a result of a combination of unemployment, debt, family conflict, lack of transport and social isolation. The more the constraint, the less options that are

realistic and may make the perception of open routes more intense. A supportive family can buffer against financial demands, a training can restore opportunity, and a connection to the community can maintain routine and recognition in breaking this cycle. It is proposed that the model consist of risks and protections. This allows to explore if frustration is linked to labour-market exclusion, while controlling for resources which could buffer this relationship.

III. Youth Unemployment and the Transition to Adulthood

Education to work is a large scale institutional transition as it is a transition to income, occupation and social status, as well as to future household formation. Nowadays, the transition into adulthood is a longer and more fragmented path for young people, though. But other forms of work, like being in and out of work, multiple jobs and being actively looking for work, can happen in one life story. Recent scoping reviews of the concept of NEET have confirmed that it is a multi-faceted phenomenon brought about by a complex mix of education, family, health, work and socio-economic problems that occur simultaneously, and that it is not solely related to the absence of activity in the labour market but extends to mental health issues, social inclusion and, in some studies, later behavioural problems. The proposed study then dichotomized employment status and duration of unemployment into two separate variables, and underemployment, and the intensity of seeking employment and degree of mismatch between qualification and job and occupation, were included as separate variables in the study.

Probably this is the reason why the problem of educated youth unemployment is of special sociological interest in India because educated youth and their families alike have come to believe that education enhances their expectation of occupational mobility, and that they are entitled to a socially recognized and respectable job. However, a fraction of job seekers who could not find employment are actively looking for jobs that they prefer to the ones that are available to them in the event that the available jobs are precarious, low-pay and it is not seen as consistent with their qualifications as revealed in recent analysis of the Indian youth labour market. The above mentioned pattern was found correlated with education, gender, residing place, caste, age, marital status and vocational training, economic status of households (census block) as identified in the contemporary research in India, which were included in the survey instrument and the hierarchical regression models of the questionnaire as control and demographic variables.

In other words, this is a prolonged and voluntary period of unemployment that has been described in the literature as “wait unemployment” and that is of sociological relevance because

it seems to imply that some part of the youth not only refuses to take up jobs they may not be qualified for, but they actively choose to wait for a job of a type they are qualified for, and at the same time remain dependent on their own families financially. One of these ways in which literature links extended unemployment with status loss and embarrassment associated with dependency, is not with extended unemployment, but with perceptions of dependency and associated emotions – this is measured directly on the social-frustration item pool on the question form and not through the duration of unemployment.

The literature on the transition reviewed for this study also warns against expecting that psychosocial resources can be evenly distributed throughout youth who are not employed. The findings of the Danish cohort studies are consistent with the notion that unemployment is not a universal risk factor for subsequent social and psychological outcomes, but rather a risk factor that varies depending on the social and psychological resources that the young person entering the labour market has when they enter. This finding is one of the reasons why the present analysis has included additional items on the psychosocial resources (perceived self-efficacy and future orientation) in addition to the main scales of the questionnaire, measuring the labour-market circumstance (unemployment exposure) and the social frustration (attached).

IV. Social Frustration as a Consequence of Blocked Opportunity

Social frustration is when someone feels their legitimate goals are not being met, thinks opportunities aren't being shared fairly, is feeling humiliated or feels their position has dropped, or is angry or hopeless about the future due to the long or recurring period of LMIs. It's not just about the psychological aspect of it; it's about what the opportunities are or aren't in the labour market, as described in the previous chapters, and people's aspirations, which are also influenced by their own level of education and the expectations placed on them within the system. In the questionnaire, social frustration is not conceived as clinical depression or as a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, but as a sociological-psychological response to the inability to access legitimate opportunities in society as manifested in questions related to people's perceptions of inequality of access to jobs, problems with status, embarrassment in dependence, anger from repeated rejection, and a lack of trust in institutions and pessimism about the future. This framing of the concept is in line with a growing literature on unemployed and precariously employed young adults that has documented regular links between extended periods of unemployment and decreased perceived control, distress, diminished self-esteem and

decreased subjective well-being, as well as that family, peer and community support can buffer against these impacts. As would be predicted, social frustration is another important intervening variable in the current analysis – the direct effect of unemployment status and the direct effect of social support are expected to have a direct effect on social frustration, in addition to the direct effect of the latter on self-reported deviant/crime-related behaviour.

The item pool for the current study offers conceptual support by analyzing experiences of precarious and/or absent work qualitatively, and considers how they are self-explained and self-regulated by young adults. This question needs to be embedded in the theory by making it personal to the youth, by having them "divert blame" away from themselves and towards the labour market, broader economy or individual employers, as a means of maintaining their self-esteem and psychologically coping with the mental-health consequences of insecure work. Where an external-attribution strategy is unsuccessful or unsuccessful in the long run (cases in which students' answers are rejected repeatedly over time) the literature suggests that blame and frustration are internalized or externalized, and in the present instance, typically as anger (which is generally congruent with the strain theoretical approach to the theoretical explanation of the study). Items that have an internal orientation and/or include the feeling of unfairness from external sources (e.g., unfairness from the employers) are included in the social frustration framework, including internally directed items that include the sense of unfairness from external sources and/or include the sense of status loss and self-blame; because the two components of frustration may not correlate in a simple or uniform way across respondents.

It's also essential to note that the social-frustration construct in the current study does not measure what it doesn't measure. It will not diagnose depression, anxiety or any clinical depression, anxiety or psychopathology condition and there will be no clinical judgement based upon the results of the answers given in the questionnaire. The current analysis does not work with the clinical or near clinical measure approach used in previous analyses (e.g., youth not in the labour force, and/or youth who were screened for depression); it measures instead a more narrowly defined, but sociologically defined construct, of perceived blocked opportunity and the associated affective response, conceptually and operationally distinct from mental health diagnosis, and intended to inform the strain theoretical model of deviant behaviour outlined in the theoretical model, rather than directly into a health related conclusion.

Dimensions of Social Frustration

There are cognitive, emotional and relational aspects to social frustration. The cognitive component is related to the beliefs of blocked opportunity, unfair procedures and lack of control. The emotional one is Anger, shame, resentment and pessimism. The relational dimension is associated with the factors of dependence, comparison with other students in labour force and conflict in the family. These sizes cannot be swapped, but may be shifted along with each other. An unfair recruitment can be felt, without being angry, or be felt as a shame, although the overall labour market may seem fair. Therefore, you have to differentiate the complaints and frustrations from each other so you can view them as separate.

This is especially important between the ages of 15 and 19. Education and social media (or peer network and age-related income and independence criteria) are indicators of occupational success. Comparison helps to explore and investigate further, but negative comparison with others may result in a feeling of failure in relation to work. The study described with the qualitative research approach (Toivanen et al., 2020) provides some understanding of the various rationales young people use to justify their situation, and of how they shift the blame for it. The study does not presume that comparing and/or depending in some way is always a source of deviance

Coping Protective Resources and Social Support

Youth respond in a variety of ways when they feel there is no opportunity. Problem-focused coping (training, wider search to work, moving and accepting temporary jobs). Emotion-focused coping – getting support and/or adjusting goals/expectations and/or withdrawing temporarily from the stressful search. Use of drugs, drinking or engaging in problems with other children who are encouraging rule breaking behaviors is one of the ways people may try to cope. Resources and context will differ in providing answers to these questions. The effects of unemployment can be confounded with pre-labour-market differences in psychological resources, as differences in the pre-labour market predict labour market participation later in life (Jensen et al., 2020).

This can take the immediate financial stress off the family and make life more manageable, but can lead to conflict or embarrassment if it continues in the long-term. Routine, information and informal supervision can be provided by community attachment. When training institutions and employment services link participants to legitimate opportunities they can give a sense of agency. The model assumes that these can be buffers and not solutions. They will be evaluated

on how they interact with people, and how well they interpret the cross sectional data which can't determine the order of frustration, support and behaviour.

From Frustration to Behaviour

There are no rules and patterns that attempt to explain the relationship between frustration and deviant behaviour. The majority of young people not in employment do not go to the lengths of committing a crime and many young people in difficult economic circumstances have strong conventional commitments. The level of risk can increase if frustration is high, coping strategies seem to be unsuccessful, informal controls are not very strong and deviant opportunities are very available. There is some research that has been able to test these factors together, and no research that has been as bold as to a one-causality explanation, but it's important to note that economic stress may play a role in the context of low self-control and negative emotion (Erickson et al., 2024). This is a conditional approach, meaning that it protects the study from the stigmatisation of the youth of unemployment. This is not to say that the population is a threat, rather to test an association, and its potential mechanism. Measures of deviance are directed towards the behaviour and frequency not to the identity. The findings on group tendencies and adjusted relationships will be reported and there will be a clear separation between 'official' crime and 'self-reported' deviant and social frustrations. The reverse and reciprocal processes will also be explored; risk exposure can be a result of exclusion and past deviance can diminish employability.

V. Conclusion

Youth aspirations play a significant role in shaping career decisions, employment choices and future life outcomes. However, the increasing complexity of labour markets has created several constraints that prevent many young individuals from achieving their desired career goals. Factors such as skill gaps, qualification mismatch, limited employment opportunities, lack of experience and changing workplace requirements create challenges during the transition from education to employment. The study highlights that employment constraints influence not only job availability but also youth confidence, career expectations and professional development. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving skill enhancement, industry-oriented education, career counselling and inclusive employment policies. Strengthening the connection between educational institutions and labour-market requirements can help young individuals develop relevant competencies and improve employment opportunities. Overall, understanding youth aspirations and employment barriers is essential

for creating supportive systems that enable young people to successfully enter and progress within the workforce. Effective interventions focusing on employability, accessibility and sustainable job creation can contribute towards better career outcomes and improved socio-economic participation of youth.

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