

# Not Employed in Education or Training (NEET) adolescents with unlawful behaviour: an observational study

*Adolescenti né studenti né lavoratori (NEET) con comportamenti devianti: studio osservazionale*

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## Summary

### Objectives

In this study, the Not Employed in Education or Training (NEET) condition was investigated in adolescents with a tendency towards unlawful behaviour, with the aim to investigate the main characteristics of such a condition during this stage of life. Tracing a socio-psychological and behavioural description is important to underline the features that characterize these adolescents and to highlight the possible sources of risk to which they are exposed as potential expression of social exclusion and psychopathological disorders.

### Methods

All subjects ( $n = 143$ , range: 16 - 19 years) involved in criminal proceedings and addressed to the Juvenile Social Service Office (JSSO) of the Juvenile Court in the Marche Region from April 2010 to May 2011 were considered. Of these, 72 subjects did not attend school, had no vocational training and did not work, according to the NEET definition; therefore, they were included in the NEET target group. Another 71 subjects were engaged in work or school and therefore they were included in the No-NEET control group. Social folders of adolescents, processed through a JSSO assessment at the time of taking charge, were considered. Data were drawn up in cooperation with Ancona Adolescent Centre. The distribution between NEET and No-NEET allowed a comparison between the two groups and categorical data were compared using the chi square test ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Results

The adolescents with illegal behaviours were predominantly males ( $m = 93\%$ ,  $f = 7\%$ ). The foreign adolescents in the sample were 21.7%, increasing significantly up to 70% among NEET ( $p < 0.01$ ). The cultural level was very low in both groups, but it was worse among NEET, with early school leavers (59%;  $p > 0.05$ ). Families with economic difficulties were higher in the

NEET (82%;  $p < 0.001$ ) compared to the control group (29%). The percentage of separated/divorced parents between NEET was 70%, which was significantly different ( $p < 0.005$ ) from the No-NEET group (30%). No drug abuse differences were found between the two groups. However, NEET committed less crimes related to drug dealing (31.3%;  $p < 0.025$ ) and fewer crimes against persons (especially sexual crimes: 21.5%) compared to the No-NEET (78.5%). NEET committed more crimes against property (62.1%), adopting violent behaviour, unlike No-NEET ( $p < 0.001$ ). 82% of the entire sample defined its friendly relations as good, but 61% of those in the NEET group did not have good socialization. Finally, a higher NEET distress with a psychopathological expression ( $p < 0.01$ ) was observed. In fact, in this group there was a higher rate of personality disorders (40.7%), cognitive impairment (29.7%) and mood disorders (22.2%). There was a significant difference between NEET and No-NEET in the type of crimes committed, in the modalities of conduct and in self-perception.

### Conclusions

This study provides an overview on the NEET condition associated with deviant behaviours during adolescence. In fact, these two culturally different phenomena can be associated only during adolescence. Generally, it is difficult to find health promotion guidelines without focusing on the socio-cultural environment, which is not always negative. Furthermore, through understanding the specific modalities of functioning of an individual in self-referring experience, it is possible to improve diagnosis and provide insight in the different individual characteristics of NEET status. This is particularly important in adolescents affected by psychological problems who do not meet standard assessment criteria.

### Key words

NEET • Not Employed in Education or Training • Disadvantaged youth • Deviant behaviours • Mental Disorders • Unlawful behaviours/Juvenile crimes

## Introduction

The acronym "NEET" refers to young people aged between 15 and 29 years who are "Not in Education, Employment or Training". In Italy, the definition of NEET is

different from the rest of Europe, because in Italy young people who are doing regional short and vocational language or computer training (up to 1 year) are also included in this term<sup>1</sup>.

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Using such a definition represents a standardized description of the status of these young people, who are not engaged in institutional work or educational training. However, the concept defines young people by what they are not, and subsumes under a negatively-perceived label a heterogeneous mix of young people whose varied situations and difficulties are not conceptualized<sup>2</sup>.

The heterogeneity of circumstances explains the different pathways of the NEETs and could describe various NEET groups having different needs and conditions such as: "core NEET"; "floating NEET" or "transition/gap year NEET". "Core NEET" are those with social and behavioural problems including those who come from families where worklessness and unemployment is an accepted norm. "Floating NEET" comprises young people who lack direction and motivation, moving between different phases of activity but returning to NEET status repeatedly after unsuccessful engagements with activities leading to drop out from college courses, training programmes, or short term spells of employment. Finally, "transition/gap year NEET" are those young people who have often chosen to take time out before progressing onto further or higher education opportunities and are likely to return to education, training or employment, but it is not always clear when this will occur<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, in Italy, the NEET population is still increasing and is much higher than the European average<sup>4</sup>. This increase is more evident in Northern and Central regions and less pronounced in Southern regions, where however the incidence of young NEET was close to 30% before the crisis. The NEET percentages in EU are drawn from different age groups. Italian NEET percentages reported by Eurostat are: 15-17 years 6.6% (6.9% of males, 6.1% of females), 15-19 years 11.9% (12.3% of males, 11.4% of females), 18-24 years 24.2% (24% males, 24.4% females), and 20-24 years 25.9% (25.4% males, 26.5% females). These data show a significant increase of the NEET population during the last years. Moreover, the differences between males and females are highly evident. Considering older groups, the NEET population increases, reaching its maximum among the 20-24 year age groups. Besides the differences between males and females, the highest female NEET percentages were observed in the 20-24 years group, but not in the younger ranges.

Unlike other countries, in Italy the NEET condition is largely due to inactivity rather than unemployment, reflecting an alarming situation of demoralization of the Italian young people that are facing the difficulty of finding a job. The level of young unemployment is 8.4%, while the percentage of inactive Italian adolescents aged between 15 and 29 years is 13.5%, compared to the European average of 7.7%. In particular, in the 15-19 year group, only 0.9% of the Italian NEET have some type of disease or disability (i.e., compared to the 2% in UK) and

most of these subjects (2.4%) think either that no work is available or that it is not easy to get; in the 15-24 years group these percentages increase to 4.5%. The Italian percentages are among the lowest in Europe together with Bulgaria, Romania, Sweden and Finland<sup>4</sup>; this fact represents the main obstacle that the inactive NEET seems to face when it comes to getting a job. The Italian data is available thanks to the research conducted by the ISTAT on typical NEET habits<sup>1</sup>.

When compared to their peers, the NEET adolescents spend most of time sleeping and doing other physiological activities such as eating and bathing. Even though these NEET should have more free time for themselves, compared to their peers, they make use of it in a significantly different way: they do not enjoy, as much, going to cinemas, theatres, museums and exhibitions. Furthermore, they read less newspapers and, in spite of common belief, they make less use of personal computers and internet. Especially, unemployed males behave as their employed peers; this conduct probably reflects the utility that the web and newspapers may have in searching a job.

In particular, 47.3% of young employed people read books. This figure rises up to 66.7% among students, but decreases to 41.3% among the unemployed and drops to 26.1% among inactive NEET. These latter participate less in social activities such as voluntary associations, political parties or other associations (11.2%) and this percentage further decreases among women who have family and children (3.7%).

The lifestyle of the adolescent NEET is not entirely healthy. In fact, while more than 50% of workers and almost 60% of students partake in physical activity, only one in four inactive NEET adolescents participate regularly in physical activity. Moreover, more than 33% of the unemployed NEET are regular smokers. This percentage is slightly higher than that observed among the employees; among the inactive NEET, one in four is a smoker. Considering alcohol consumption, students and especially employees have a higher risk behaviour than NEET. Finally, the exclusion from training courses and working associates is related to lower levels of family relationship satisfaction. In particular, it has been observed that, among the inactive NEET, there is a low level of satisfaction with regards to relationship with friends (especially among women) and fitness (especially among men).

The NEET, however, report similar peer levels of leisure time satisfaction, particularly among men. There is, nonetheless, a certain degree of disadvantage observed: the NEET, especially those with lower education, show less cultural interest, lower social participation rates and less satisfaction for their lifestyle.

Generally, long-term unemployment brings further difficulties, such as psychological changes that can work

against likelihood of future chances of employment or training. Reduced self-esteem, feelings of self value, and expectations of success all decrease the likelihood of a successful outcome in job-seeking, or may reduce the motivation to seek work at all. Many long-term unemployed people cease to believe in their ability to regain employment, bringing a personal cost and cost to society<sup>5</sup>. This seems to show that it is the NEET condition, more than adequate cultural and work stimuli, which negatively influences these young adults, even those with a higher education. According to ISTAT report, in fact, the NEET condition could force these adolescents into a process of cultural depauperation and social devitalisation, which will continue to grow as the NEET condition lasts over time. The more one remains unemployed or out of the training system, the harder it is to reintegrate oneself; therefore, permanence in the NEET state is a risk indicator of social exclusion<sup>1</sup>.

The NEET condition is not necessarily permanent. Before the crisis, between 2007 and 2008, 32% of young people left the NEET condition over the following 12 months. In the years after, the permanence of this condition increased: only 28.8% of young people who were NEET in 2009 emerged from this condition a year later. The probability to leave the NEET condition decreased more in the Northeast and Centre of Italy (areas that had the highest leaving rates before the crisis). Between 2008 and 2010, transitions into employment fell from 74.5% to 69.5%, while educational activities increased from 25.5% to 30.5%.

Risk factors that contribute to the NEET condition can be either environmental or individual. Considering environmental risk factors, Bynner et al.<sup>6,7</sup> identified that two of the most important risk factors were a low social-economical Status (SES) and the family situation.

ISTAT data, however, reminds us that among adolescent NEET who live with at least one parent, one-third belonged to medium-high social classes. Therefore, the NEET condition did not concern only the lower social classes, but can also be related to subjects with higher educational qualifications<sup>1</sup>. In Italy, the social status of NEET is lower than that of students and employees. In fact, just over 50% of the NEET who live with their parents belong to the working class, while students or young employees of the same age group come from different social classes. Only 8.2% of males and 12.3% of females come from higher social classes, while 60% of women in the role of reference person, married, cohabiting, or in single parent families, belong to the lower social classes. There is an important difference between young NEET and their peers, because among young people who live with at least one parent, 30% of NEET belong to medium-high social classes, with no difference between males and females. Therefore, the phenomenon concerns not

only the lower social classes. The SES has an important role especially for males; those with low SES have the highest percentages of lack of movement and exercise, and thus are predisposed to have poor health lifestyles.

The NEET in most cases live with one parent; this occurs in the South of Italy for more than three to four NEET. The proportion of those who live in a household where no member works exceeds 25%. Compared to 2008, this percentage increased by 3% in Italy and the increase was stronger in the Centre and North-east.

Among young NEET, the foreign component, which in 2010 reached 14% of total NEET in Italy (15-100 age group), has an important role. Nineteen percent of male subjects are NEET; among women it increases to 44.4%, especially when compared to ages closer to 24 years (15-24 years).

ISTAT does not provide data concerning the kind of crime committed by young NEET people. Generally, during 2009, adolescents committed more crimes against property than against the person. More in detail, between 14 and 17 years, 19,988 adolescents were charged, most of them (n = 4981) belonging to the Italian north-west area, 4281 to the north-east, 3911 to central Italy, 4189 to the South and 2626 to the islands. The unlawful behaviour rates on 100,000 adolescents were: 200.8 crimes against the person, 3.1 volunteer killings, 90.2 beatings, 488.4 crimes against property (among these, 64.8 robbery, racketeering 16.1, 2.5 fraud), and 167.3 other crimes. In fact, in Italy, the literature shows a greater tendency towards crimes against property (especially by nomads) and drug smuggling (mainly among North Africans)<sup>8</sup>.

As above mentioned, considering the significant increase of the NEET phenomenon, the European Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) launched a health promotion and training program for this target group of young people, developed by partners from 5 European Countries (Italy, Denmark, France, UK and Austria).

The project will develop a concept promoting healthy lifestyles that considers the socio-economical key factors such as geographic location, individual lifestyles, living conditions, and the influence of local communities and peer groups. To meet the complex requirements of the project each "Health25" partner Country have developed a field survey in a pre-defined area that could be a representative sample for the area investigated and at the same time may be a valid element describing the target group of each partner Country. Data collection, analysis and field survey are finalized to deduct relevant criteria for health promotion concept and intervention programmes in each Country<sup>9</sup>. The Psychiatric Unit of Polytechnic University of Marche – "United Hospitals" of Ancona was the Italian "Health25" partner.

This research is part of a wider study on NEET status as required by the project "Health25" and focused on an

Italian sub-sample with relevant psychopathological and deviant conditions. Therefore, the research aims to define the main characteristics of the adolescent with a NEET condition among those who have a tendency towards unlawful behaviour, with the purpose to trace a possible socio-psychological and behavioural description. The goal is to focus on features that characterize these adolescents and to highlight the possible sources to which they are exposed, with the risk of social exclusion and psychopathological process.

Analyzing such characteristics in a territorial perspective is, also, a first step for defining a more comprehensive assessment of the NEET adolescents.

## Methods

Considering the NEET condition in the Marche region<sup>1-10</sup> (where NEET adolescents are 16.5%), attention was paid to a target group of high risk adolescents involved in criminal proceedings and for this reason addressed to the Juvenile Social Service Office (in Italy "Ufficio Servizio Sociale Minorenni": USSM) of the Juvenile Court in the Marche Region, from April 2010 to May 2011. All data were taken from the social folders of adolescents, processed during the assessments made by the USSM team (psychologists and social assistants) at the time of taking the subject in charge. Since the USSM is a regional institution, 143 subjects, aged between 16 and 19 years from all over the Marche Region were involved: 57 from the province of Ancona (40%), 31 from Pesaro-Urbino (22%), 24 from Macerata (17%) and 22 from Ascoli Piceno (16%). The sample consisted of 132 males (93%) and 11 females (7%). In the period under review, of the 143 subjects belonging to USSM, 72 did not attend any training or employment and therefore fell within the NEET condition, and 71 subjects, defined as No-NEET, were engaged in work or school. Although the sample was predominantly male, the distribution between NEET and No-NEET allowed comparison between the two groups. The study was conducted through secondary analysis of the data: statistical information was obtained from the social files of each individual. The aspects considered were: personal data (sex, age, information regarding family), school and level of education (number of years repeated and/or school dropout), work, health status (presence of mental disorders, drug or alcohol use), parental or reference network and quality of peer relationships, type of crime committed, and parental tendency to drug abuse and to crime. The chi-square test<sup>11</sup> was used for statistical analysis to test the difference between the NEET group and the No-NEET group (control group). Statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

With regard to mental disorders of the adolescents belonging to USSM, all previous diagnoses by the local mental health services were considered, and all diagnoses (made according to the DSM criteria) were registered<sup>12</sup>.

## Results

The distribution of each variable under examination between the NEET and the No-NEET allowed comparison between the two groups (see Table I).

### Nationality

In the USSM sample, 78.3% (112 subjects) were Italian, while foreigners were 21.7% ( $n = 31$ ). Among the foreign adolescents, 70% ( $n = 22$ ) were NEET, while the No-NEET percentage was 30% ( $n = 9$ ). The NEET distribution between foreigners and Italian was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 5.719$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### School attendance

Regarding the school level reached, 5 subjects (about 3%) did not have any recognized school certificate, 17 subjects (about 12%) reached primary school certificate, while 121 subjects (85%) had a secondary school certificate. Considering the school attendance, there was no relevant difference between the NEET and the No-NEET, except for the data related to the difficulties that the subjects had during their school career. About 45% ( $n = 64$ ) of the sample had to repeat the school year in more than one occasion and 16 subjects (11%) left school. While the school-year-repeat rate among the NEET was higher when compared to the No-NEET, the school drop-out percentage among NEET reached 59% ( $n = 9$ ) ( $\chi^2 = 0.056$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### Mental disorders

18.9% of the sample (27 subjects) suffered from psychiatric disorders, diagnosed by psychiatric services<sup>5</sup>, before belonging to the USSM. When considering mental disorders, there was a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 7.263$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the NEET ( $n = 22$ , 81.5%) and the No-NEET ( $n = 5$ , 18.5%) groups. In fact, in NEET subjects, psychopathology concerned personality disorders (11 subjects, 40.7%), specifically those related to the cluster B such as borderline and antisocial personality disorder; 8 NEET adolescents had mental retardation (29.7%); two subjects had ADHD (7.4%) and 6 were affected by mood disorders (22.2%).

### Drug abuse

31% of the sample ( $n = 44$ ) were drug abusers, with a higher percentage among the No-NEET (56%,  $n = 25$ ). This difference, however was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.925$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Drug abuse was characterized as follows: 27 individuals (61%) made use of cannabis, 9 individuals (20%) consumed cocaine and methamphetamine and 8 individuals (19%) made regular use of opioids. The drug abusers showed a trend towards multi-drug abuse.

### Family

With regard to household, both family composition and economic condition prevailing in the family were evaluated. 58% of the sample ( $n = 83$ ) of parents were married, and 36 of these (44%) were parents of NEET. However, 47 subjects (33%) had separated or divorced parents. Among the NEET, the percentage of separated/divorced parents was about 70% compared to 30% in the No-NEET group. This difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 9.898$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). Finally, concerning the orphan condition, there were 13 individuals (9%), with a percentage of 54% in the NEET group (7 subjects).

Data concerning the economic condition showed that 29% of families ( $n = 42$ ) were in a state of financial difficulty and the rate of economic problems was much higher in the NEET (82%) than in the No-NEET group (18%) ( $\chi^2 = 24.044$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Furthermore, not only was the economic condition analyzed, but also their sense of discomfort, due to this condition, was considered. In fact, 27 subjects (19%) came from families with a history of complaints about illegal activities with a percentage of 86% among the NEET and 14% among the No-NEET. In 19% of adolescents, their parents used alcohol and/or drugs. Regarding this latter issue, the percentage in the NEET group was more relevant than in No-NEET group, amounting to 55%. Among the remaining 81% of the sample ( $n = 116$ ), when considering only parents who did not use alcohol or drugs, the frequency in the NEET group (49%,  $n = 57$ ) was comparable to that of the No-NEET group (51%,  $n = 59$ ), with a substantial overlap of data.

### Socializing

Considering friendship, 117 subjects (82%) defined their relations as stable and good. 18% ( $n = 26$ ) did not provide any answers and, among these, the NEET rate was clearly predominant accounting for 61% of the total ( $n = 16$ ) ( $\chi^2 = 1.091$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### Crimes committed

Among the major classes of crimes committed, there was a significant difference in the distribution of all offenses. The crimes most often committed by persons under review were those against property, constituting 45.5% of the sample ( $n = 66$ ), followed by crimes against persons and drug smuggling, representing, respectively, 23.8% ( $n = 34$ ) and 22.4% ( $n = 32$ ). Among the foreigner NEETs, we found similar behaviours to the Italian NEETs when taking into account all crimes analyzed: 63.3% ( $n = 14$ ) regarded crimes against property and robbery; 13.35% ( $n = 3$ ) were crimes against the person and 18.2% ( $n = 4$ ) concerned drug smuggling.

As the study showed, 46% ( $n = 66$ ) of the sample had violent behaviour in the past, represented in 10% of cases ( $n = 7$ ) by specific acts of cruelty to persons or animals. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of the major classes of crimes when comparing NEET and No-NEET (Table I).

### Discussion and conclusions

The data from the study are in agreement with the literature, since they identify many of the major risk factors predisposing to the NEET condition. The two groups analyzed came from the same database consisting of people who committed crimes. Since the tendency to unlawful behaviour is greater in males, our sample was composed predominantly of male individuals.

**TABLE I.**

Main differences in crimes committed in NEET and NO-NEET groups. *Principali differenze nei reati commessi dai gruppi NEET e No-NEET.*

Kind of crimes	NEET	No-NEET	$\chi^2$
Crimes against property	60.6% ( $n = 40$ )	39.4% ( $n = 26$ )	4.425*
Robbery	66.6% ( $n = 48$ )	33.4% ( $n = 23$ )	2.337
Crimes against person	53% ( $n = 18$ )	47% ( $n = 16$ )	0.310
Sexual violence	21.5% ( $n = 2$ )	78.5% ( $n = 12$ )	0.655*
Violent behaviour	62.1% ( $n = 41$ )	22.7% ( $n = 15$ )	17.776*
Acts of cruelty to persons or animals	71.4% ( $n = 5$ )	28.6% ( $n = 2$ )	0.016
Drug smuggling	31.3% ( $n = 10$ )	68.7% ( $n = 22$ )	5.072*

\*  $p < 0.05$

The research showed a large component of foreigners, which was significantly larger compared to the percentage of foreigners in the Italian population<sup>4,13</sup>. Foreigners were also predominant in the NEET population; it is possible to partially explain this data with the dynamics of a “negative circular causations”<sup>14</sup>, meaning that individuals in penalizing conditions can add additional disadvantages to their biography, and to stagnate in conditions of structural deviance, psychopathological problems, poverty and exclusion. As expected, the sample had a population with a low educational level and a high percentage of school problems (in terms of school years repeated and drop-outs). The data concerning school-year-repeats showed no significant differences between the two groups investigated. These differences were, however, more substantial when considering early school drop-outs: in particular, 11% of the sample left school before finishing the compulsory school attendance, and among these the NEET percentage was more accentuated. Finally, none of the subjects achieved a high school diploma, so the possibility to get a job became more problematic.

When considering family data, the NEET condition was more common in families with divorced or separated parents, in line with other studies on NEET<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, a fifth of the entire sample’s parents incurred in illegal activity and the same percentage used drugs. Most of these were the parents of NEET.

In our study, poverty had a statistically significant impact on the NEET condition. One third of our sample consisted of economically disadvantaged families, and 86% of these were NEET’s families.

Our data suggest that in an urban social context the relationship between juvenile delinquency and socio-economic marginality tends to be more labile for Italian adolescents.

According to the literature<sup>10</sup>, an image of NEET emerged characterized by the absence of educational qualifications because of their early school leaving, multiple absences during the school, disability or health problems. With regard to friendship, furthermore, the results showed that, among those who did not have that resource, the percentage of NEET was much higher (61%). Therefore, living in a state of loneliness and having low relational skills are high risk factors for the NEET condition. The tendency to self-isolation is not only a risk factor for the NEET condition, and it is also as an important signal of a possible slide towards psychiatric problems.

In fact, our research showed a high prevalence of psychopathology among NEET. Approximately one third of these subjects showed a borderline or antisocial personality disorder: their personality traits were characterized by finding a way to cope with the world, and their behaviour was independent both from adequacy and social acceptability. Therefore, due to their condition of absten-

tion from the main dynamics of social cohesion, NEET adolescents must be considered at risk for mental disorders. Another third of the sample had mental retardation, while the remaining fell into mood disorders.

Furthermore, in the last 50 years, many studies have underlined the relation between unemployment and physical or psychosomatic illness. Our data is thus in accordance with the literature. Among these, the study of Paykel<sup>16</sup>, on concurrent causes of depression, showed that the unemployed person is a regular visitor to physicians, and at the same time a compulsive consumer of pills; the physician and the psychiatrist/ psychologist, may collude in assigning the sick role. The unemployed shows an inability to develop emotional skills and emotional relationships, a high degree of anxiety and phobia (especially social phobia), rigidity with regards to family relationships and stress-related disorders.

As De Leo argued, it would be reductive to consider a single factor as the only cause of the NEET or deviant condition<sup>17,18</sup>. Certainly, the NEET condition does not concur to wellness and remaining in this condition can be cause of psychic distress. It is therefore important to investigate the characteristics of these target groups. Our research showed significant differences in the deviant behaviour between the NEET and the No-NEET. Differently from literature<sup>8</sup>, our study showed that there was no particular difference in the type of crimes committed between Italians and foreigners, especially among the NEET.

The NEET committed mostly thefts and robberies, crimes against property, and aggressive and cruel behaviours. With regard to thefts and robberies, it is useful to remember that these subjects remain in an inactive state, often characterized by economic unavailability. The type of stolen goods (cell phones, video games, game consoles) showed that the purpose of these robberies was not linked to their survival, but to the opportunity to have possessions, which for them identifies with a high SES. It could seem that often the cause of these criminal behaviours is the “appearance culture”.

Crimes against property (vandalism, damage, etc.) may be associated with two factors: the sense of frustration because of their inability to live up to individual and social expectations, and the tendency to sublimate this gap through aggressiveness. The tendency to commit such crimes can also be seen as a message of rebellion against the adult world that cannot be reached.

When taking into account aggression and cruelty towards animals or things, the difference between NEET and No-NEET was evident. A significant difference was found in sexual offenses, particularly abuse, where the percentage of the NEET was very low compared to that of the No-NEET. The same trend was found for drug smuggling which was much more common among the No-NEET.

Data on drug use was in line with those of the Italian population.

Despite the interpretations of differences identified between NEET and No-NEET, two aspects seem to have a relevant role: deviance and NEET condition. Both are expression of psychopathology, even if they are not considered by the official criteria for mental disorders. According to this consideration, Italian and international literature on NEET showed that these subjects close their relational perspectives within peer groups, with a strong tendency to deviance, that is a basic element for identification<sup>19</sup>. In the Japanese cultural context, for example, greater psychological distress is expressed by Hikikomori adolescents. “Hikikomori” corresponds to “social withdrawal” and it is a contraction of “shakaiteki hikikomori”, where the two verbs “hiku” (to go back) and “komoru” (to hide, to isolate) became Hikikomori, a worrying phenomenon widespread in Japan in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Italian NEET do not show the same social problems of Hikikomori and they are, also, very different from Japanese NEET, because the latter tend to have a fairly active social life and do not present psychological problems<sup>21</sup>.

This study highlights the frustration and aggressiveness in driving behaviour among NEET adolescents. Therefore, the risk for mental disorder in these subjects requires specific and timely interventions, improving training<sup>22</sup>, working and employment and, as first line strategy, promoting mental health. Finally, according to the “Health25” project guidelines<sup>9</sup>, intervention must be directed to understand and manage the individual modalities in organizing personality, focusing the NEET behaviour during adolescence, when some basic subjective personality characteristics become stable<sup>23,24</sup>.

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