Barriers to studying and working: a new look at the NEET concept in Chile

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the number of Chilean young people not in education, employment, or training —NEETs— remains comparatively high and major gender gaps persist. Recent studies have revealed the heterogeneity of this social group, but they have failed to provide an in-depth analysis of its characteristics informed by the reasons which its members regard as the source of their situation. The aim of this study is to characterise Chilean young people according to their reasons for not working or studying. Based on data from a subsample of 236,424 subjects included in the Chilean Socioeconomic Characterisation Survey, descriptive, cluster, and bivariate analyses were performed. These analyses revealed 3 NEET profiles according to the presence of certain barriers —family, health, attitudinal, psychological, or access-related— or a lack of interest in working and/or studying. Subjects were thus classed as: unidimensional NEET, bidimensional NEET, and disinterested. The data revealed that a large number of young people are inactive and that gender factors have an impact on the presence of barriers. The data also confirmed the complexity of NEET status, calling into question its use as an analytic category. Furthermore, our findings highlighted the need for a gender-informed approach in the analysis and intervention efforts targeting this group in Chile.

Introduction

Youth is a vital transitional stage from a state of dependence (childhood) to one of autonomy (adulthood) (Hopenhayn, 2004). It is cemented through certain milestones associated with family emancipation and economic independence, which involve completing the mandatory educational period and finding employment; furthermore, young people must leave the parental home, often to form a new family and take up a parental role themselves (Dávila y Ghiardo, 2009).

In Latin America, large sectors of the youth population must deal with structural factors that hinder their access to tertiary education and employment (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe & International Labour Organization, 2017; Hoyos et al., 2016). Although youth is a time associated with milestones that bolster individuals' social mobility, such as access to education, leisure, and employment, this ultimate goal is rarely attained (Rivera-González, 2013).

In recent decades, various studies have been carried out on the phenomenon, highlighting both individual and social adverse effects. On the one hand, being a NEET predicts future salary reductions, especially for men, and negatively affects the chances of finding a job for women (Székely & Karver, 2015). In general terms, what happens during this stage functions as a forecast of future employment trajectory (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe & International Labour Organization, 2017). On the other hand, considering macroeconomic factors, it has been shown that having large sectors of youth who do not study or work reduces productivity, generates a loss of quality of human capital, effects the perpetuation of inequalities and favours situations of social exclusion such as crime, drug use and other risk behaviours (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe & International Labour Organization, 2017; de Hoyos et al., 2016)

In Chile, as in other OECD countries, this NEET group has noticeably shrunk in the last decade, although it is still elevated considering the reduction in poverty rates and the mass entry of young people into higher education (Gómez, 2016). The number of Chilean NEETs is above the OECD average, even more so between 20 and 24 years of age, (Carrillo et al., 2018) and has one of the highest gender gaps in the group. Most of the studies on this population were based on the National Socioeconomic Characterisation Survey (CASEN). Some studies proposed predictive models that allowed for estimating the probability of being a NEET according to certain factors (Gómez, 2016), while others analysed public intervention policies with this social group, pointing out the insufficiency of their scope, the lack of an interdisciplinary approach or the inexistence of a gender perspective (Elizondo, 2017; Repetto, 2013). Several studies focused on the differences between men and women in terms of the reasons given for being outside the educational system and the labour market (Comunidad Mujer, 2018; Elizondo, 2017). The pattern that persists over time is that young women's decisions are motivated by domestic duties and motherhood; while for their male peers it's due to a lack of interest.

There is a significant number of international studies that point to the persistence of gender roles that explain the unequal participation of women in the labour market (Carrillo et al., 2018; Hoyos et al., 2016; Gómez, 2016; Vance and Utzet, 2018) and the greater likelihood that they end up in a situation of not studying and not working (Gontero & Weller, 2015; Vancea and Utzet, 2015). This is the reason why the gender gap is considered one of the variables that allow for a deeper characterisation of this population group.

Although there is a history of NEET typologies in other countries (Giret et al., 2020; Salvà-Mut et al., 2017; Tamesberger et al., 2014; Tomczyk et al., 2018), in Chile`s case there is evidence of a gap in the literature regarding the profiles generated, according to decisional or barrier reasons that lead to not studying, not working or both. Nor have they considered their own capital (labour and educational), which may be differentiators for leveraging a substantial change in their trajectories. The research question for this study was: What are the profiles of Chilean NEETs. Unlike previous studies (Hazbun, 2013; Rosas Mercado & García Piedras, 2014; Vancea & Utzet, 2018), to address this question our criteria for analysis focused on: a) Classifying the types of reasons they argue for not working and studying, according to whether those are barriers or personal decisions. b) Preparing profiles of NEETs according to the types of reasons for not studying and working, and their socio-demographic characteristics and, c) Analysing how NEETs profiles were developed and how previous work and educational experience are related to that development. Our central argument is that the NEET category in Chile is not uniform, but rather contains different profiles that emanate from the reasons for not studying and working. Each of them presents specific sociodemographic characteristics and is related to differences in previous work and educational experience.

First, the present article offers a conceptual and empirical review of the NEET category. Given that sex has been identified as one of the most relevant variables for understanding this phenomenon, one of the subsections presents empirical evidence for the differences found between men and women.In the methods section, we cover the secondary data sources used as well as the selection of research subjects, and the analysis techniques employed (descriptive, bivariate, and clustering). Lastly, we present and discuss the results obtained, answering our research question.

Conceptual and empirical review of the NEET category

The debate on NEET status

From a conceptual perspective, some controversy exists regarding how authors have studied NEETs. The term *NEET* is used to refer to a whole group of young people as if they displayed a single issue, thus obscuring the complexity of the combination of these two variables: neither studying nor working (Feijoó, 2015). Each person's situation can be due to a variety of factors: wishing to have some free time before going to university, having to shoulder family responsibilities, dealing with disabilities, diseases, or behavioural issues, or being temporally unemployed, among others (Avellaneda & Elizondo, 2016; de Hoyos et al., 2016; Machado & Muller, 2018). Some of these circumstances are influenced by the position of each person's family within the distribution structure of cultural, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1979, 2000; Canales et al., 2015, Dávila, 2009).

Several authors have studied the barriers that people must deal with, specifically in the sphere of education. For instance, Cross (1981) proposed the Chain-of-Response Model to demonstrate that individual motivation is the factor with the largest influence on participation in the educational system. Based on this notion, we defined three potential barriers to participation: situational, which resulted from circumstances that limit people, such as family responsibilities; dispositional, which included the individual's beliefs, attitudes, or values; and institutional, derived from institutional norms that are external to the individual. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), based on the model advanced by Cross, developed the Psychosocial Interaction Model, which stresses the importance of socioeconomic status, a factor considered to have a positive effect on individuals' willingness to study and on the perceived usefulness of education. In this regard, the contributions of Roosmaa and Saar (2016), who applied the classification proposed by Cross in a transnational study on the barriers perceived by adults, are relevant. According to those authors, the literature has merely described the barriers faced by potential participants in the educational system, without delving deeper into the barriers affecting those who choose not to participate. Their findings revealed that people's decisions were limited by structural and institutional factors, as well as by their individual characteristics.

Assuming the NEET status as only a personal choice renders invisible its subordination to mandatory school attendance cycles in each country, personal or family needs, and the opportunities offered in the job market (Feijoó, 2015). Research conducted in Europe demonstrated that the NEET category cannot be used to encompass the whole range of situations affecting young people during the school-work transition. That is why several authors have stressed the importance of developing typologies to address the diversity of this phenomenon (EUROFOUND, 2012; Salvà-Mut et al., 2017; Tomczyk et al., 2018; Giret et al., 2020).

Additionally, the importance of not sanctioning this situation through a discriminatory use of the concept has been pointed out. For many young people it can be an unwanted situation and it does not mean they are inactive. The assumption that this is only a matter of individual will fails to adequately describe the situation of these young people (Furlong, 2006), and generates prejudiced assumptions (Vancea & Utzet, 2018), or stigmas (Comari, 2016).

Empirical evidence of NEET status

Studies on young NEETs have revealed two dissimilar situations. Some authors have identified young people who, in an effort to adapt to the labour world successfully, have devoted more time and resources during their formative period and have delayed their emancipation to achieve this adaptation in ideal conditions (Casal et al., 2006). In Chile, research has shown that the increased duration of classroom study and the acquisition of more advanced educational qualifications have operated as social mobility mechanisms, since they have facilitated access to better jobs in terms of working conditions and salaries (Dávila, 2009). These young people usually had external financial

support, which has enabled them to switch jobs until they find one that meets their expectations (Cunningham & Salvagno, 2011; in Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe & International Labour Organization, 2017). Alternatively, they may have choosen to become 'voluntary NEETs' (EUROFOUND, 2012), uninterested in either education or work and taking time to deal with their lack of information or uncertainty about the labour market or to define their professional aspirations. This was an 'investment choice' that young people made to buy some time until they had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in the future and thus maximise their future earnings (Hazbun, 2013).

Increased social vulnerability was another characteristic of NEET status, since young people in this category tended to have a low educational level and limited employability (De La Torre & de Riccitelli, 2018; De La Torre & De Riccitelli, 2017). Nearly one quarter of Latin American NEETs did not have primary education, while 43% did not finish secondary education (de Hoyos et al., 2016). Chile is a country characterised by delayed dropout rates, which tends to occur in secondary education (Székely & Karver, 2015). Young people who dropped out of school were excluded from foundational and/or work circles for long periods, took part in the underground economy, and were affected by chronic unemployment and low employability (Casal et al., 2006).

Recent studies with samples of Chilean young people have revealed that family economic resources were a strong determinant of the likelihood of becoming a NEET. Among the most relevant results were a positive correlation between per capita household income and the incidence of NEET status (Carrillo et al., 2018; Gómez, 2016; INJUV, 2017). In addition, it has been observed that young people who neither study nor work mostly belonged to the lower socioeconomic levels (37%), while among the upper levels this situation the minority (4%; INJUV, 2013).

Being in the NEET category for an extended period may have had a scarring effect (Székely & Karver, 2015). This occurred when people from one generation experienced a long period of inactivity in their youth, which caused them to encounter more difficulties when trying to enter the job market, and if they did find employment, they experienced poorer conditions (e.g. lower salaries, instability). Even more so, recent studies have suggested that low educational and social capital were strongly associated with the long-term likelihood of being a NEET (Giret et al., 2020).

Gender gaps among young NEETs

There is abundant international evidence about the NEET experience depending on an individual's sex. Women were more likely to be inactive (they did not seek employment) while their male peers tended to be unemployed (they were actively seeking employment; Carrillo et al., 2018; de Hoyos et al., 2016; Gómez, 2016). In Latin America, even though women's entry into the work market led to an increase in the prevalence of male NEETs, women still represented 2/3 of this group. In Chile, women were twice as likely to be NEETs, while the OECD mean was 1.4 times. The main explanations offered in the literature referenced cultural aspects associated with the sexual division of labour and the near exclusive allocation of caretaking and domestic duties to women (Gontero & Weller, 2015). This has been the case even in European countries, despite their more developed social protection systems and years of investment in equity policies, as the higher percentage of NEET women attests to the persistence of rigid gender roles, women's difficulties in attempting to balance work and personal life, and their higher likelihood of obtaining precarious employment (Vancea & Utzet, 2018).

In Chile, the percentage of female inactivity has decreased since the 1990s (Comunidad Mujer, 2018). However, Chile is still one of the Latin American countries where female inactivity remains high. The persistence of gender gaps has been identified as one of their reasons for remaining inactive. Among women aged 18 to 24 years, the predominant factors identified were domestic duties, pregnancy or motherhood (30.1% in 2015); while for men, they were lack of interest and the need to finish their studies (39.6%). Furthermore, a longitudinal analysis of the data revealed that over the last three decades, inactivity figures remained similar among the generations of men in the

period considered, whereas for women the figures increased between 25 and 29 years of age (Comunidad Mujer, 2018). Studies conducted in other countries have yielded comparable evidence, showing how motherhood and domestic duties increased women's —but not men's— likelihood of becoming NEETs (Arceo & Campos, 2011; Vancea & Utzet, 2018).

The gap also has been illustrated by the duration of the school-to-work transition in Chile. Even though it has not been among the longest in Latin America, it lasts five years for men and nine for women (Gontero & Weller, 2015).

There are also major differences associated with marital status. According to 2015 data, although young NEETs tended to be single (93.9% of men), most women had cohabited with their partner or were married (49.8%; INJUV, 2017). This reinforced the argument that family and domestic duties limited a woman's chances to finish her education or enter the labour market.

Additionally, it has been proven that a having a low educational level increased the likelihood of becoming a NEET by 3.8% (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016), while inactivity —being unemployed and not looking for a job— also correlated with this variable, especially for women. Further supporting this association, the gender gap was larger among those who had no formal education and smaller among those with higher education (Comunidad Mujer, 2018). Also, a longitudinal analysis of multiple generations confirmed that —educational level being equal— all generations of women were less likely than men to enter the labour market (Comunidad Mujer, 2018).

Methods

Data and sample selection

This study presents an analysis of the data provided by the 2017 Sociodemographic Characterisation Survey (CASEN), conducted by Chile's Ministry of Social Development. The probability sample encompassed residents of the country, except for those living in certain areas with poor accessibility. It collected information on the living conditions of the population, addressing such aspects as education, work, income, health, identities, networks and participation, and housing and environment.

The subsample analysed in this study comprised 236,424 people residing in Chile whose ages ranged from 18 to 29 years. Additionally, the participants reported that they were not enrolled in formal education, had not worked in the previous week, had not performed any one-time remunerated tasks, and were not off work for any justified reasons. The final analysis excluded individuals who were about to start or resume their studies.

Different national and international organisations define young people as those between 15 and 29 years of age (UNESCO, 2013; INJUV, 2017). This criterion has also been adopted by authors studying the NEET phenomenon in Chile (Arceo & Campos, 2011; Avellaneda & Elizondo, 2016; Gómez, 2016; Carrillo et al., 2018). However, our study established 18 years of age as the lower limit. Chilean law requires that minors must be enrolled in the education system and prevents them from working without the express authorisation of their parents or legal guardians. In addition, it has been determined that the percentage of NEETs aged 15–19 is considerably smaller. The most common option at that age was to attend an educational centre (Comunidad Mujer, 2018; Gómez, 2016).

Analysis methods

Statistical methods

After the 2017 CASEN survey data were compiled, a bivariate analysis with contingency tables was used to define types of NEETs according to their reasons (factors) for staying out of education and employment (Table 1, Figure 1). These groups of NEETs were then later profiled. Several sociodemographic variables were evaluated with Chi-squared and ANOVA tests with the various NEET

Table 1. Distribution according to factors for not studying and not working.

| | | | | | Factors for not working | | | | |
			Family Barriers	Psychological Barriers	Access Barriers	Health Barriers	Attitudinal Barriers	Other Barriers	Personal Choice	Total
Factors for not studying	Family Barriers	Count	120,601	517	858	1543	582	9060	2370	135,531
		% row	89.0%	0.4%	0.6%	1.1%	0.4%	6.7%	1.7%	100.0%
		% column	81.1%	27.0%	38.5%	5.8%	13.9%	25.5%	13.7%	57.3%
		% of total	51.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.7%	0.2%	3.8%	1.0%	57.3%
		Adjusted residual	304.4	−27.0	−18.1	−180.3	−57.3	−131.3	−120.7	
	Psychological Barriers	Count	162	34	22	204	38	0	0	460
		% row	35.2%	7.4%	4.8%	44.3%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% column	0.1%	1.8%	1.0%	0.8%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
		% of total	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
		Adjusted residual	−12.3	15.8	8.5	22.5	10.6	−9.0	−6.0	
	Access Barriers	Count	12,248	297	606	1765	997	5384	1865	23,162
		% row	52.9%	1.3%	2.6%	7.6%	4.3%	23.2%	8.1%	100.0%
		% column	8.2%	15.5%	27.2%	6.6%	23.8%	15.2%	10.8%	9.8%
		% of total	5.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.7%	0.4%	2.3%	0.8%	9.8%
		Adjusted residual	−33.2	8.4	27.8	−18.4	30.8	37.0	4.4	
	Health Barriers	Count	3672	107	246	21,074	70	2340	1017	28,526
		% row	12.9%	0.4%	0.9%	73.9%	0.2%	8.2%	3.6%	100.0%
		% column	2.5%	5.6%	11.0%	79.3%	1.7%	6.6%	5.9%	12.1%
		% of total	1.6%	0.0%	0.1%	8.9%	0.0%	1.0%	0.4%	12.1%
		Adjusted residual	−186.5	−8.8	−1.5	357.0	−20.8	−34.3	−26.0	
	Attitudinal Barriers	Count	2056	234	39	763	58	1665	1652	6467
		% row	31.8%	3.6%	0.6%	11.8%	0.9%	25.7%	25.5%	100.0%
		% column	1.4%	12.2%	1.7%	2.9%	1.4%	4.7%	9.5%	2.7%
		% of total	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	2.7%
		Adjusted residual	−52.5	25.5	−2.9	1.4	−5.4	24.5	57.0	
	Other Barriers	Count	3431	189	63	945	672	13,121	1698	20,119
		% row	17.1%	0.9%	0.3%	4.7%	3.3%	65.2%	8.4%	100.0%
		% column	2.3%	9.9%	2.8%	3.6%	16.1%	37.0%	9.8%	8.5%
		% of total	1.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.3%	5.5%	0.7%	8.5%
		Adjusted residual	−140.7	2.1	−9.7	−30.7	17.7	208.5	6.3	
	Personal Choice	Count	6525	539	395	297	1765	3905	8733	22,159
		% row	29.4%	2.4%	1.8%	1.3%	8.0%	17.6%	39.4%	100.0%
		% column	4.4%	28.1%	17.7%	1.1%	42.2%	11.0%	50.4%	9.4%
		% of total	2.8%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.7%	1.7%	3.7%	9.4%
		Adjusted residual	−108.3	28.3	13.6	−49.0	73.5	11.5	192.4	
Total		Count	148,695	1917	2229	26,591	4182	35,475	17,335	236,424
		% row	62.9%	0.8%	0.9%	11.2%	1.8%	15.0%	7.3%	100.0%
		% column	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	62.9%	0.8%	0.9%	11.2%	1.8%	15.0%	7.3%	100.0%

Source: Own work based on 2017 CASEN survey
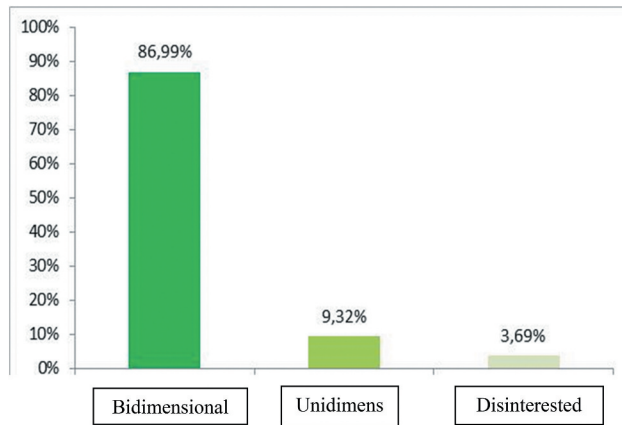
Figure 1. Distribution according to NEET´s profiles. Source: own work based on 2017 CASEN survey

Table 2. Statistical evaluation of sociodemographic variables.

Variable	Type of variable	χ2/df	F /df	P	Cramér's V	P	ηp²/r	f/w
Age	Numerical		2571.32/236,423	0.000			0.15	1.00
Schooling	Numerical		3213.41/222,287	0.000			0.17	1.00
Adjusted per capita household income	Numerical		673.59/236,423	0.000			0.07	1.00
Number of people in the household	Numerical		501.19/236,423	0.000			0.06	1.00
Live children	Numerical		4644.49/234,040	0.000			0.20	1.00
Sex	Categorical	17,330.64/2		0.000	0.27	0.000	0.24	1.00
Marital status	Categorical	7733.02/2		0.000	0.18	0.000	0.24	1.00

Source: Own work based on 2017 CASEN survey

groups. Apart from their statistical significance, we considered the size and power effect of each variable (Table 2). Afterwards, the variables found to be statistically significant according to the bivariate analysis were used as determining factors for the definition of the profiles. These factors were obtained through a multivariate analysis with bi-stage clusters (Table 3). Developed by Chiu, Fang, Cheng et. al (2001) this technique was chosen because it allowed us to work with large amounts of data and with both categorical and continuous variables (Vilà-Baños and Rubio-Hurtado, 2017; Bittmann and Gelbard, 2007). Furthermore, it is a multivariate technique that does not seek to identify an objective result, but rather, like the k-means method, attempts to reveal clustering patterns between the analysed variables by maximising intragroup homogeneity and heterogeneity between groups MooSarstedt and Mooi, 2014). Limitations include poor results when the number of cases is very low and when very few variables are used (three or less), something that

Table 3. Distribution according to NEETs profiles.

Variable	Double barrier	Barrier	Disinterested
Marital status	84% with partner	85% without partner	85% without partner
Sex	94,1 % female	Male and female	63% male
N° of children	1.12 average	0.5 average	0.2 average
Age	Between 22.3–26 years	Between 21.5–22 years	21.73 years
Monthly Income	130,000 Chilean pesos per capita	130,000 Chilean pesos per capita	180,000 Chilean pesos per capita
N° of people in the home	Rates from 5-7 – 3.5	Rates from 5.7–3.5	Rates from 5.7–3.5
Educational level	11.29 years	10.46 years	9.81 years

Table 4. Distribution of NEET types by work experience.

			Have you ever had a job?		
			Yes	No	Total
Profiles of NEETs	Bi-dimensional NEETs	Count	127,937	77,242	205,179
		%	62.4%	37.6%	100.0%
		Adjusted residual	30.7	−30.7	
	Unidimensional NEETs	Count	11,550	10,388	21,938
		%	52.6%	47.4%	100.0%
		Adjusted residual	−27.2	27.2	
	Disinterested NEETs	Count	4767	3966	8733
		%	54.6%	45.4%	100.0%
		Adjusted residual	−12.9	12.9	
Total		Count	144,254	91,596	235,850
		%	61.2%	38.8%	100.0%

Source: Own work based on 2017 CASEN survey

does not apply to this study (Bacher et al 2004). Lastly, using bivariate tests, we evaluated the human capital stock (Jiménez & Simón 2002) —in terms of work experience and educational level— available to each of the profiled NEET groups (Tables 2 and 4, respectively).

Results

Categories of reasons to be a NEET in Chile

NEETs were identified upon the basis of their reasons for not studying or working (Table 5). To do so, we defined three broad categories of reasons and Chi squared analysis and standardised residuals, presented in Table 1. The first set of reasons were conceptualised as 'barriers' consisting of internal or external factors (family demands, psychological or attitudinal predispositions, physical access to educational or work settings, health issues, or other problems) that prevented or greatly hindered subjects' ability to work or study. The second set of reasons were labelled 'disinterest' in working or studying (personal choice), while the reasons in the third set were labelled 'activity status'. This latter set included individuals in transitory situations who were initiating or finishing their studies or waiting to enter the job market. This was an intermediate step between continuing their education or entering the job market. This third category also was comprised of people who were not in employment due to their studies (inactive) and those who did not study because they had a job (active).

Taking into account this initial categorisation of cases (based on the reasons reported by the participants), our typology of NEETs excluded the active and inactive population. Furthermore, we generated a variable that considered the subjects' reasons not only for not studying but also for not working. It included the following values: (1) no interest in either working or studying (disinterested); (2) no interest in either working or studying, along with a barrier to working or studying (unidimensional NEET), and (3) barriers to continuing their education and finding a job (bi-dimensional NEET).

Table 1 shows the final distribution of the sample of 236,424 cases in the different types of reasons for not studying or working and a statistically significant relationship ($\chi 2$ (25, N = 236,424) = 238,881, p < .000, r = .45, w = 1.00) between the factors for not studying and those for not working. Thus, for the group of so-called bi-dimensional NEETs, it was observed that more than 50% of the sample was concentrated on 'family' barriers and reached a corrected standardised residual of 304.4. To a lesser extent, 'health barriers' were also among the most prevalent factors —despite representing less than 10% of cases— and had an equally high typified adjusted residual. 'Other barriers' were similarly relevant. Thus, it was observed that the bi-dimensional NEETs were largely defined by 'unidirectional' and 'bidimensional' factors; that is, the same barrier limited their education and their work opportunities.

Table 5. Types of reasons for not studying and not working.

		Reasons for not working [c]	Reasons for not studying [d]
BARRIERS	FAMILY	Nobody can take care of children, older adults, or other family members (3,4,5) / Housekeeping duties (10)	Needs to help at home or assist others with housekeeping duties (1) / Pregnancy, maternity, or paternity (2) / Family problems (5)
	PSYCHOLOGICAL	Thinks nobody will employ him/her. (7)	At his/her age, it would be pointless to study or he/she does not know how to complete his/her studies (8)
	ACCESS	The rules, schedules, and commute times of the jobs on offer are unsuitable (8) / The salaries offered are too low (9)	Economic problems (11) / There are no education centres nearby (15) / Access or mobility issues (16)
	HEALTH	Is ill or has a disability (6)	Has a disability or needs to attend a special education centre (3)
	ATTITUDINAL	Is tired of looking or thinks that there are no jobs available (14)	Performance issues (13) Expulsion or cancellation of enrolment (14)
	OTHER BARRIERS	Another reason (17)	Another reason (17)
DISINTEREST	DISINTERESTED	Has no interest in working (16)	Is uninterested (6)
ACTIVITY STATUS	ACTIVE POPULATION[a]	Will start working soon (independently or for a third party). (1) / Is awaiting the outcome of prior actions (2) / Has another income source (13) / Looks for work when he/she really needs it or has sporadic jobs (15)	Has a job or is seeking one (12)
	INACTIVE POPULATION[b]	Student (11) / Retiree or pensioner (12)	Has finished his/her education (7) Is attending a university entrance exam preparation centre (9) Is preparing for the university entrance exam on his/her own (10)

[a]Active population: People old enough to work, unemployed, but actively seeking employment.
[b]Reduced inactive population: People old enough to work but unemployed. Excludes homemakers and people disabled as a result of disease or disability. Includes students, retirees, and pensioners.
[c]Question o7r1 from CASEN questionnaire: What is/are the reason/s why you did not seek employment or took any measures to begin doing freelance work in the last four weeks?
[d]Question e5a from CASEN questionnaire: What is the main reason why you do not currently attend an educational establishment?

The second group, the unidimensional NEETs, were comprised of those prevented from studying or working by a barrier, but who were also uninterested in any alternatives to that barrier. They combined the impossibility of studying and working (not being unable to) and the choice of staying out of education and employment (not wanting to). In this group at a descriptive level, we observed a preponderance of 'family' type barriers, working with a total of 2.8% of the sample, and of 'other barriers' with 1.7%, when added to the decision not to study. In contrast, for subjects who did not work due to a lack of interest, no single barrier predominated in combination with any of the barriers to studying.

Lastly, the 'disinterested NEETs', self-identified by their choice to avoid working or studying, predominated at a descriptive level. Taken together, these two categories accounted for 3.7% of the sample; furthermore, they displayed large residuals (192.4) compared to the rest of the categories. This definition generated a number of particularities and differences relative to the bi-dimensional NEETs. The disinterested NEETs reported that no conditions were preventing them from entering the job market or the educational system, in contrast to the unidimensional or bi-dimensional NEETs. In other words, their choice was a reflection of their own will, not a product of any barriers; they were a group that stood outside the job market and the educational system due to autonomous —not heteronomous— factors. For a distribution of the total number of subjects defined as NEETs see, Figure 1.

Sociodemographic profiles of NEETs in Chile

Based on the identification, quantification, and categorisation of the cases into three groups according to the subjects' reasons for not studying and/or not working, we generated sociodemographic profiles that allowed us to delve into some of their defining traits. To do so, a dual analysis was conducted —see Table 2—: (1) a bivariate analysis (Chi-squared and ANOVA, along with their respective size and power effect) that made it possible to identify significant sociodemographic variables and (2) a two-stage cluster analysis based on the previous analysis and the combined relevance of all the variables. Owing to their statistical significance, the following variables were selected: age, educational level, household income adjusted per capita, number of children, sex, and marital status.

Based on this information, a two-stage cluster analysis was conducted, with a silhouette coefficient of 0.4. This made it possible to profile the three types of NEETs defined by sociodemographic variables, of which the most relevant were family variables (marital status and number of children) along with NEET status and sex (Table 3).

Regarding the marital status variable, a majority of the bi-dimensional NEETs reported having a partner (84%). In contrast, the unidimensional and disinterested NEETs largely reported not having a partner (85%).

Regarding the predominant sex in each group, the bi-dimensional NEETs tended to be women (94.1%), with a profile comparable to that of the unidimensional NEETs, although the latter were more evenly distributed between men and women: 100% and 97.8% respectively. In contrast, the disinterested NEETs were almost exclusively male (63%).

With respect to the subjects' number of children, the bi-dimensional NEETs surpassed the rest (1.12 on average); next were the unidimensional NEETs (0.5), followed by the disinterested group (slightly over 0.2).

Age was another significant variable. The bi-dimensional NEETs were between 22.3 and 26 years old, the unidimensional ones between 21.5 and 22 years old, and the disinterested ones —the youngest— were 22 years old on average.

In terms of income, the differences were evident, especially between the bi-dimensional and the unidiemensional NEETs —whose average per capita household income was approximately 130,000 pesos— and the disinterested NEETs, who received over 180,000 pesos. In other words, the latter had the highest income of all NEET groups.

Although the households of all three groups featured approximately 4.8 people on average, the bi-dimensional NEETs were the most diverse, with some homes being composed of 5.7 people and others comprising less than 3.5.

Lastly, in line with the information presented, the bi-dimensional NEETs were found to have the highest educational level, followed by the unidimensional and the disinterested NEETs. The latter had less than 10 years of schooling on average.

In general, it can be established that differentiated NEET profiles do exist. The bi-dimensional NEETs had a feminised profile, possessed work experience and a higher educational level, were about thirty years old, had a relatively higher average number of children than the other NEETs, and lived in homes with more members and less economic resources. The unidimensional NEETs were more diverse: both women and men, had fewer children than the bi-dimensional NEETs, were younger, earn less, and had an intermediate educational level. Finally, the disinterested NEETs were less homogeneous. They were younger men from (comparatively) wealthier families who lived in smaller family groups (with fewer children of their own and fewer people per household).

Characterisation based on work and educational experience

Lastly, after establishing a profile for each group of NEETs, we compared the human capital of each group according to the two variables that define their NEET status: educational level and work experience.

Although the bivariate analysis (Analysis of variance – ANOVA) and the cluster analysis revealed significant differences between the types of NEETs in terms of educational level (Table 2) it was necessary to evaluate the direction and significance of this difference, both for this variable and for work experience. As can be seen in Figure 2, the differences between the types of NEETs with respect to the average years of education were statistically significant ($F_{(2, 222,287)} = 3213.41$, $p < .05$, $\eta p^2 = 0.17$, $f = 1.00$), implying that NEETs with a bi-dimensional (11.29 years of education) had a higher educational level than those with only one barrier (10.46 years), and, even more so, regarding the disinterested (9.81 years).
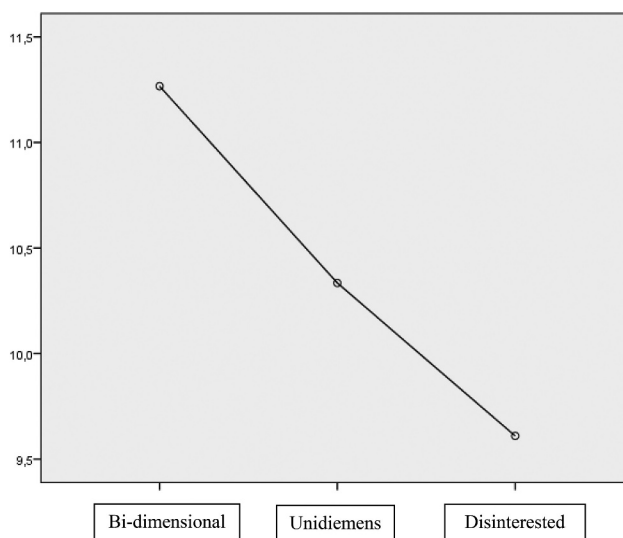

Figure 2. Mean differences in average years of schooling to NEET profiles. Source: own work based on 2017 CASEN survey

Secondly, the groups were compared considering whether the subjects had any work experience, with results (Chi-squared test; χ2 (2, N = 235,850) = 951.093, p < .000, r = .07, w = 1.00) indicating that, in general, subjects with work experience were in the majority in all groups (Table 4). However, the comparative analysis revealed that the bi-dimensional NEETs were significantly more likely to have had work experience than the other groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article presented the results of a study that aimed to analyse the profiles of NEETs in Chile based on their self-identified reasons for not studying and working as well as their previous work and educational experience. Unlike other studies (from Hoyos et al., 2016), we identified the so-called NEETs by eliminating other variables that rarely managed to adequately characterise them and established a classification of the types of reasons for not studying and working, depending on the case barriers or personal decision.

Inactive young people and those who were on the verge of entering the labour market or some educational option were quantified and, given their particularity, were not considered as NEETs, but rather as a population in transition towards participating in an educational process and/or the labour market. This would explain the disparity in results with respect to previous studies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016), which indicated a lower number of inactive people compared to other countries and, at the same time, corroborated the need to establish the differences between inactive and those who wait, from those who integrate early to a job or professional training (Feijoó, 2015).

We found evidence for the existence of heterogeneous profiles, which were less influenced by subjects' lack of interest or the need to wait for the outcome of their decisions (e.g. starting a job or taking a higher education entrance exam) and more effected by exogenous limitations derived from barriers. This situation challenged the legitimacy of NEET as a concept and made it necessary to reconsider its use as an analytic category, since it generated a false homogeneity within a highly diverse population and might even result in social stigmatisation. In this regard, our findings were consistent with recent criticism of NEET as a concept (Giret et al., 2020; Salvà-Mut et al., 2017; Tomczyk et al., 2018).

To expand on the characterisation of the sample, we profiled each group of NEETs according to a set of sociodemographic variables and analysed their influence together with that of work experience and education. In line with prior research (Carrillo et al., 2018; Comunidad Mujer, 2018; Elizondo, 2017; Gómez, 2016; INJUV, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016), the findings presented confirm that women are more likely to be NEETs, mainly due to reasons linked to domestic duties, caregiving, and other gender-based barriers. These women NEETs had a higher educational level, had accumulated more work experience, and were older, but they also have had considerably more children and a lower household income. These findings were consistent with studies on Italian (Contini et al., 2019) and Spanish NEETs (Vancea & Utzet, 2018), which indicated that older female youths (24 to 29 years of age) were more likely to enter this category. In addition, women —but not men— were more likely to stay out of education and employment in households with more members (Gómez, 2016).

In contrast, the category of profiles predominated by disinterested people were mostly young men with fewer children and from households with higher incomes. They were the ones with less education and tended to have no previous work experience. It is not clear whether this profile could be assimilated to that of 'vulnerable NEETs' or that of 'volunteer NEETs' (EUROFOUND, 2012) who had taken their situation as an investment option (Hazbun, 2013). Investigations are required to verify whether they were people passing time, having vocational indecision or with other problems that might underlie their situation.

In response to the research question, we highlighted the way in which factors for not studying and not working were articulated – whether they were from barriers or lack of interest in each case – and allowed for clearer detection of the profile characteristics of young NEETs, which also affected the possibilities of participating in the labour market or of having longer educational trajectories. This study, which was an effort to address the gap in Chilean literature on this social issue, revealed that not all 'NEETs' were on an equal footing in terms of their possibilities of overcoming their situation. The evidence indicated that a human capital loss had taken place which might have compounded social exclusion and hindered productivity, especially affecting women, who possessed a higher educational level and more work experience (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe & International Labour Organization, 2017; de Hoyos et al., 2016).

Together with the above, we concluded that the number of young people in Chile who neither study nor work was much smaller than asserted in prior research, which had considered those people seeking employment to be NEETs. This evidence lends further support to the view that the traditionally defined concept of NEET conceals the complexity of the variables that lead people to stay out of employment and education. When analysing the phenomenon in Chile, we identified multiple and varied reasons that have led to these subjects´situation, highlighting the importance of considering both structural and personal factors when analysing the educational (Roosmaa and Saar, 2016) and employment situation of youth.

It would also be advisable to reassess the wisdom of placing minors within the same category. Since their freedom of choice, hindered by legal restrictions, other concepts and variables (school dropout, neglect, child labour), added complexity to their NEET status.

Lastly, from the perspective of social intervention, we emphasised the importance of gender-informed approaches for examining the case of young women excluded from the job market and education. There was a profile of women made invisible and characterised by factors operating as social barriers, which limited their work and educational prospects. It was not a matter of disinterest, personal will, or insufficient experience or qualifications. Thus, more research on this profile is needed in order to generate early warning strategies and courses of action aimed at increasing equity in access to work and education opportunities.

Disclosure statement

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at http://observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial. gob.cl/casen-multidimensional/casen/casen_2017.php

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