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Enhancing Youth Employability in the Caribbean: Lessons from UK NEET Programmes

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Research Objective

- Drawing on lessons from employment enhancement programmes (EEPs) in the UK:
 - Improve the effectiveness and design of EEPs in the Caribbean for NEET youth (those not in employment, education or training).
 - Base this improvement on monitoring and evaluation.
 - Place emotional resilience at the centre of this evaluation.
- To provide an emerging evidence-base for policy-makers in the Caribbean and the UK.



Research Rationale

- The research is relevant as:
 - Youth Unemployment consistently high in the Caribbean due to:
 - Economic/State structures;
 - relevance of skills;
 - to individual psycho-social issues.
 - Programmes to address youth unemployment in the Caribbean have been characterised as:
 - ‘piecemeal’ and ‘limited in impact’;
 - evaluation suffers from an *‘absence of a culture of research, evaluation, impact assessment and documentation and dissemination of best practice’* (Social Impact Inc., 2013:17).
 - Building of emotional resilience is *one* core factor in enhancing the employability of NEET youth:
 - Whilst understanding that NEET youth are not a homogenous group.

Presentation Overview

- The presentation will explore:
 - The prior literature in relation to NEETs:
 - Definition.
 - Statistics.
 - Causes.
 - The concept of emotional resilience/self-efficacy.
 - Research aims and methods.
 - Results:
 - Quantitative data.
 - Qualitative data.
 - Discussion of key themes & implications for the Caribbean.
 - Summary.
 - Limitations & future research.



Defining NEETs

- The NEET concept is now a global term:
 - Describes economically inactive youth.
 - Specific demographic variables are used within different countries.
 - Explored in Taiwan (Chen, 2011); Estonia (Leino et al., 2013); Germany (Reiter and Schlimbach, 2015); and South Africa (Kraak, 2013).
 - 270 papers from around the world that explore NEET status.
- NEET group is heterogeneous in nature. In the UK, NEETs have been classified into 3 main sub-groups (Yates and Payne, 2006):
 - *Transitional*: Temporarily NEET due to circumstance, but who quickly reengage with employment, education or training.
 - *Young Parents*: Make a conscious decision to disengage with employment, education or training in order to look after their children.
 - *Complicated*: Young people who also exhibit a number of 'risks' in their lives.

NEET Statistics

- NEET rate is normally significantly higher than traditional unemployment.
 - EU (EU28) unemployment rate is 9.2%, compared to a continent wide NEET rate of 19.7% (Eurofound 2016a; Statista, 2016).
 - In the UK the NEET rate was 13.8% at the end of 2015 (DfE, 2015).
 - In the Caribbean, youth unemployment ranges from 13.2% to 35.5% depending upon the country (Caribbean Development Bank, 2012).
- Youth unemployment rates in the Caribbean have consistently been above global averages, in good times and in bad (Lashley et al. 2015).



Causes of NEET Status

- Prior research has identified diverse factors behind NEET status at the macro- and micro-levels:
- Macro-level factors (Lashley et al., 2015):
 - The structure of the economy/labour market;
 - The educational system;
 - Societal issues related to social exclusion (e.g. discrimination).
- Micro-level factors:
 - Low socio-economic status;
 - Low birth weight;
 - Poor educational experience and/or limited qualifications;
 - Lack of personal agency (including self-efficacy and resilience)
(Evans and Heinz, 1994; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Hazenberg, 2012).

Emotional Resilience

- Emotional resilience relates to:
 - Stress-resistant qualities' (Beddoe et al., 2013);
 - Protective construct that enhances well-being (Grant and Kinman, 2012);
 - Self-identity (Rajan-Rankin, 2014);
 - Self-worth and professional development (Lynn, 2009).
 - Externalised locus of control (Andersen, 1977).
- A lack of emotional resilience can reduce employability, whilst unemployment further damages emotional resilience (Brehm, 1966).
- A lack of emotional resilience (e.g. nervousness) can impact on self-efficacy and hence life-chances (Bandura, 1997).
- Self-regulative efficacy is concerned with an individual's task focus and emotional balance when under pressure/stress (Schwarzer et al., 1999).

Research Aims

- The research explored the following research aims/hypothesis:
 - *Research Question 1:* What cognitive/emotional factors do NEET individuals perceive as being important in contributing to their NEET status?
 - *Research Question 2:* How do the three employability programmes affect the NEET individual's emotional resilience and self-regulation?
 - *Hypothesis 1:* NEET participants on the three employability enhancement programmes (EEPs) will display a statistically significant increase in SRE between Time 1 (starting the intervention) and Time 2 (completing the programme).
 - *Hypothesis 2:* SRE will act as a predictor of NEET 'drop out' at the three EEPs.



Mixed-Methods Research



- NEET participants engaged in the UK's Foundation Learning programme at 3 EEPs (2 x Social Enterprise; 1 x For-profit):
 - 20 week intervention that seeks to raise participant's generic skills in ICT, maths and English, improve their team-working and social skills, and improve their resilience, confidence and motivation.
- Qualitative research was longitudinal. Participants engaged in:
 - Semi-structured interviews at Time 1 and Time 2.
 - Sample consisted of 34 interviews at Time 1 and Time 2.
- Quantitative research was longitudinal. Participants:
 - Completed Schwarzer et al.'s (1999) 10-item Self-Regulation Efficacy Scale at Time 1 and Time 2.
 - Sample consisted of:
 - 142 NEETs at Time 1.
 - 74 NEETs at Time 2.

Quantitative Data

- No statistically significant increase in SRE amongst the NEET participants that completed the EEPs.
- Focus here on emotional resilience as a predictor of EEP drop-out:
 - NEET sample dichotomised into upper and lower complements based upon a median split of their SRE scores at Time 1.

Cross-tabulation for SRE & EEP Completion				
Scale	Complement	EEP Completed		X ²
		Yes	No	
SRE	Lower	43.1%	56.9%	4.11 (<i>p</i> < .05)
	Upper	60.5%	39.5%	

- Results demonstrate that NEETs with lower SRE were x2 as likely to drop-out of the EEP as those with higher SRE.

Qualitative Data

- At Time 1 NEETs had negative images of the 'self' that led to:
 - Low confidence, poor social skills, poor motivation, boredom and difficulty controlling their emotions.
 - Rooted in negative prior experiences and poor role-models.
 - In relation to self-efficacy this represents poor mastery and vicarious experience.
- At Time 2 NEETs had more positive images of the 'self':
 - Increased confidence, social belief and intrinsic motivation.
 - Argued that the EEPs had begun to give them mastery experiences.
 - Still struggled academically and emotionally though (frustration).
- We believe that this represents improved employability.

NEET Homogeneity

- NEETs remain a homogenous group. However, the focus here was on complicated NEETs.
- Amongst this sub-group we believe that emotional resilience is an important factor in:
 - Increasing EEP completion.
 - Enhancing employability.
- Self-regulative efficacy can act as predictor of those complicated NEETs most at risk of remaining unemployed.
- Recognition that NEET individuals, even within subgroups, will have heterogeneous needs & require individual support.

Resource Constraints

- Resources and funding for EEPs are scarce and so programmes need to be able to target support (focus on outcomes and impact rather than simply output).
- Therefore, EEPs should have multiple intervention paths for individuals with tailored support. This support should be based around:
 - Developing emotional resilience and self-efficacy.
 - Focused on depth of out-reach.
- The monitoring and evaluation of EEPs can contribute to this through:
 - Real-time data on beneficiary needs.
 - Identifying weaknesses in EEP design that can be remedied through evidence-based redesign.

Scaling



- There is a potential need to scale-up interventions in the Caribbean given the ‘piece-meal’ approach to date.
- Multiple intervention paths within one EEP can reduce the impact of such scaling by providing:
 - Holistic support in one place for NEETs.
 - Efficiency savings through amalgamated administration and evaluation costs.
- The third sector could offer an alternative solution in the delivery of EEPs that reduces the strain on governments and NGOs.
 - Social enterprises in the UK have played a significant role in labour-market integration.

Summary

- A lack of emotional resilience and self-regulative efficacy are characteristic of the complicated NEET group.
 - Can act as predictors of EEP completion & hence employability.
- This has important implications for the design and delivery of EEPs.
 - Multiple intervention paths for NEETs.
 - The monitoring and evaluation of EEPs and the use of data to inform support.
- Research limitations
 - This paper is based only on data from UK NEETs & EEPs.
 - Sample in the UK is limited and qualitative bias towards NEETs that completed the EEP.
- Future Research:
 - The replication of this study in the Caribbean.

Thank you
for listening

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