

## **Chapter II**

### **Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Non-engaged Youth**

#### **Definition of “Non-engaged Youth”**

1. The term “young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies” include the following two categories of young people aged between 15 to 24:
  - 1.1 Unemployed young persons in the economically active population (including those who do not seek work because they believe work is not readily available).
  - 1.2 Young persons in the economically inactive population who are not studying (excluding those who are full-time home-makers or who cannot work due to chronic illness).

“Non-engaged Youth” generally refers to economically inactive young people who are not pursuing any studies.

#### **Severity of Problem**

2. According to the Census and Statistics Department’s General Household Survey, youth unemployment rates for the first and second quarters of 2002 (12.9% and 14.7%, respectively) were considerably higher than those of the total labor force (6.9% and 7.6%). In terms of number of young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies, the number of unemployed young persons aged 15 to 24 in the first and second quarters of 2002 were 49,700 and 57,600 respectively, while the number of economically inactive young persons who did not pursue any studies during this period were 19,200 and 16,700 respectively, making a total of 68,900 and 74,300 for the two quarters.
3. If the latest figures of June-August 2002 are used as a basis, the number of unemployed persons aged 15 to 24 was 73,600, while the number of economically inactive young persons who are not pursuing any studies was 20,500, making a total of 94,100. There is still an upward trend.
4. There is another population of young people who deserve attention. They are those who took part in the 2002 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). The following figures are revealing:-

School Candidates entered for HKCEE in 2002	90,297
Repeat S5 in school (estimated figures)	20,000
Subsidized S6 places	26,400
Other formal training opportunities (estimated figures)	23,980
Non-engaged S5 leavers	19,917 (estimated)

It is estimated that there are approximately 19,917 people from this population who are still floating around looking for jobs or opportunities for further education. It should also be noted that there is no information indicating those who will pursue studies outside Hong Kong nor the situation of the 37,319 private candidates of 2002 HKCEE.

5. The updated figure of non-engaged youth may not be the sum of the figures in paragraphs 2 to 4 because they stood at different times, the Commission believes that it is likely to be larger than 94,100.

### **Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics**

6. *Age:* Unemployment rates amongst younger adolescents (15 to 19 age group) have been consistently higher than those of older adolescents (20 to 24 age group). This may be due to the inadequate job skills possessed by young people. For the economically inactive group, a similar trend is observed.

7. There are two points that should be noted with reference to the above observations. First, research findings show that there are relatively more adjustment problems among older adolescents as compared to those in younger adolescents. As such, the potential damaging effect of unemployment on the mental health among younger adolescents that would carry into late adolescence is worth noting. Second, the observation suggests that more effort should be spent to help unemployed and non-studying young people in early adolescence.

8. *Gender:* The male to female ratios of young persons who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies were much higher than those of the whole population in corresponding age groups. While this may be explained by the higher school participation rate among females aged 15 to 24 and higher proportion of homemakers among females aged 20 to 24, this observation suggests that the relatively lower school participation rate among males aged 15 to 24 is a concern, and that gender should be taken into account in designing strategies to help these young people.

9. *Educational Attainment:* Generally speaking, educational attainment of young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies was lower than that of the same age group in the population. In contrast to the observation that 18.3% of those aged 15 to 24 in the whole population attained lower secondary or

below education, 34.6% of the young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies had an educational attainment of lower secondary or below. In addition, the proportion of young people in the target group with tertiary education was lower than that of the general population (6.9% vs. 19.3%).

10. In connection with the above, there are two questions that deserve consideration. The first question is how lower educational attainment contributes to youth unemployment. With economic re-structuring and the demand for knowledge-based vocational skills, it is obvious that low educational attainment is a strong hindrance to job searching and maintenance. The next question is why there are young people with low educational attainment, such as early school dropout and discontinuation of study after Secondary 3. Besides individual factors such as the lower abilities to study, there may be linkage between family social capital and human capital, i.e. children in families with stronger family cohesion and parental support tend to have higher educational attainment and better academic performance.

11. *Newly Arrived Persons*: There is no evidence to suggest that newly arrived persons constitute a more major proportion of the non-engaged youth in Hong Kong.

12. This observation is important in that it demystifies that unemployment is strongly associated with new immigrants coming from the Mainland. It also suggests that there is a need to consider the question why despite their high risk status (such as post-migration adjustment and stigmatization), unemployment does not appear to be more acute for young immigrants from the Mainland. There are two possible explanations for this observation. First, they may not be choosy about jobs. Second, they may make much effort to improve themselves so that they are more marketable. For example, Lam and Sung (2002) provided qualitative findings to illustrate that young immigrants coming from the Mainland strive hard to receive higher education.

13. *Geographical Characteristics*: The proportion of young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies among population aged 15 to 24 in new towns was 8.6%, which was slightly higher than the territory's figure of 8.0%. In particular, the proportion was relatively higher at Yuen Long (10.4%), Tin Shui Wai (10.8%), Northern New Territories (9.2%) and Tai Po (9.2%). It should also be noted that the districts with relatively higher rates of youth unemployment and non-pursuance of studies are also districts with relatively high juvenile crime rates.

14. *Family*: Amongst the households with youth who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies, 17.9% of them were households with one parent. This proportion was higher than the corresponding figure (12.9%) in households without the target group members living with one parent. There are research findings showing that the psychosocial adjustment (including social competence and academic performance) of young people in non-intact families is relatively poor compared to those in intact ones. While different factors may contribute to such differences, one possible reason is the impairment of family functioning among non-intact families (Patton & Noller, 1991). It has also been shown that young people in non-intact

families perceived their families to be more dysfunctional than those in intact families.

15. With regard to income, the median monthly household income was \$18,625 for households with target group members living with both parents, which was lower than that of households without such target group members (\$23,405). Similarly, while the median was \$12,000 for households with young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies living with one parent, the corresponding figure for households without such target group members was \$17,000. This observation generally suggests that youth unemployment is more pronounced in families with relatively lower household income. Obviously, it is important to examine the related mechanisms that may mediate the relationship between these two domains. In particular, it would be meaningful to ask how economic disadvantage might contribute to unemployment among adolescent children in low-income families.

16. As regards of the educational attainment of parents of young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies, it was generally lower than that of parents from households without the target group members. For target youth living with both parents, some 23% of the parents had attended upper secondary and matriculation education as compared to the 30.8% among parents in families without the target group members. In addition, the proportion of tertiary-educated parents of the target youth (regardless of whether living with both parents or one-parent) was much lower than that of parents from households without target group members.

17. There was basically no significant difference between the proportions of working parents in households with young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies and the corresponding proportions in households without the target youth. Among the target youth aged 15 to 24 living with both parents, 37.9% had both parents working as compared to the 40.6% for non-target group members living with both parents. Similar pattern was found for households in which young people aged 15 to 24 lived with one parent only.

18. *Role of Family in Adolescent Unemployment and Non-Pursuance of Further Studies:* An integration of the observations highlighted above suggests that young people who are unemployed and unable to pursue further studies are more likely to be associated with the lower-income class (Note: the current median family income is \$18,705 for all households in Hong Kong). The basic conjecture that can be formulated is that the lower educational attainment of the parents is conducive to the relatively lower household income among families with young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies.

## **Implications**

19. The above observations suggest that the following points should be taken into account when formulating policies to tackle the issue of unemployment and non-pursuance of studies among young people:

- 19.1 Unemployment constitutes additional psychosocial stress for unemployed young people and their families. Specific attempts to counsel and build up the resilience of these people would therefore be important.
- 19.2 As unemployment rates were relatively higher in younger adolescents than in older adolescents, strategies and intervention should be age-sensitive.
- 19.3 As unemployment rates were relatively higher in males than in females, strategies and intervention should be gender-sensitive.
- 19.4 Both territory-wide and district-wide strategies should be devised to cope with youth unemployment.
- 19.5 Family-based intervention strategies should be extensively used. Socio-economic antecedents of youth unemployment should be realized and how such antecedents would affect the family processes should be taken into account when formulating the related strategies. In addition, the adverse effects of youth unemployment on the family should be appreciated. Early prevention effort within the family context should be considered.

**Table 1: Unemployed persons by age**  
(1982 to 1999 and Q1 2000 to June-August 2002)

Year	Age group			
	15 - 19	20 - 24	15 - 24	All ages
1982	18 700	22 600	41 300	91 100
1983	20 400	27 200	47 700	113 900
1984	19 500	25 600	45 100	101 000
1985	16 400	21 000	37 500	83 600
1986	14 800	20 400	35 300	76 200
1987	8 800	13 400	22 200	47 400
1988	7 500	11 400	18 900	37 700
1989	5 500	9 100	14 700	29 700
1990	7 400	9 800	17 100	36 600
1991	9 200	10 700	19 900	50 400
1992	6 800	12 800	19 600	54 700
1993	7 600	12 600	20 100	56 300
1994	7 300	12 000	19 400	56 200
1995	10 700	18 300	29 000	95 600
1996	11 100	17 500	28 600	87 400
1997	8 800	13 900	22 700	71 200
1998	18 200	28 400	46 600	154 100
1999	22 900	35 600	58 500	207 500
Q1 2000	19 700	26 300	46 100	182 600
Q2 2000	19 700	28 500	48 200	168 100
Q3 2000	18 000	31 500	49 400	167 200
Q4 2000	15 900	23 200	39 100	149 600
2000	18 300	27 400	45 700	166 900
Q1 2001*	15 100	23 700	38 800	149 600
Q2 2001*	14 700	21 800	36 500	152 600
Q3 2001*	18 400	39 000	57 500	186 100
Q4 2001*	19 700	32 200	52 000	210 700
2001*	17 000	29 200	46 200	174 800
Q1 2002	18 600	31 100	49 700	238 900
Q2 2002	21 300	36 200	57 600	263 400
June-August 2002	28 300	45 400	73 600	274 000

Notes : \* Figures slightly revised to take into account the revision made to the population and labour force figures upon availability of the final end 2001 population estimates in August 2002.

Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source : Census and Statistics Department

**Table 2: Economically inactive young persons who are not pursuing any studies  
(1982 to 1999 and Q1 2000 to June-August 2002)**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Age group</u>		
	<u>15 - 19</u>	<u>20 - 24</u>	<u>15 - 24</u>
1985	7 400	6 000	13 400
1986	5 800	5 500	11 200
1987	11 500	7 400	18 900
1988	13 500	6 200	19 600
1989	11 800	6 300	18 200
1990	7 800	5 100	12 900
1991	7 200	6 600	13 700
1992	8 600	5 800	14 400
1993	7 700	6 400	14 100
1994	9 300	7 000	16 200
1995	7 800	6 400	14 200
1996	8 300	7 000	15 300
1997	9 400	7 100	16 500
1998	8 300	6 600	14 900
1999	9 100	8 900	17 900
Q1 2000	9 800	7 700	17 500
Q2 2000	8 400	10 100	18 600
Q3 2000	9 700	10 800	20 500
Q4 2000	12 200	8 500	20 800
2000	10 000	9 300	19 300
Q1 2001*	9 800	9 900	19 700
Q2 2001*	8 900	8 200	17 100
Q3 2001*	13 000	10 200	23 200
Q4 2001*	12 700	8 100	20 800
2001*	11 100	9 100	20 200
Q1 2002	10 500	8 700	19 200
Q2 2002	9 600	7 100	16 700
June-August 2002	10 400	10 100	20 500
Average :	9626	7718	17344

Notes : \* Figures slightly revised to take into account the revision made to the population and labour force figures upon availability of the final end 2001 population estimates in August 2002.

The coverage of these young persons prior to 1998 is slightly different owing to different classification schemes adopted for economically inactive persons.

Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source : Census and Statistics Department

**Table 3 : Young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies by age and sex, June - August 2002**

	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Unemployed persons			
15 - 19	16 400	11 900	28 300
20 - 24	26 200	19 100	45 400
Total	42 600	31 000	73 600
Economically inactive young persons who are not pursuing studies			
15 - 19	6 200	4 200	10 400
20 - 24	5 200	4 900	10 100
Total	11 300	9 200	20 500
Total			
15 - 19	22 600	16 100	38 700
20 - 24	31 400	24 100	55 500
Total	53 900	40 200	94 100

Note : Numbers may not add up to the totals owing to rounding.

Source : General Household Survey



**Table 4 : Young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies by educational attainment, June - August 2002**

<u>Educational attainment</u>	<u>Number</u>
Primary and below	1 100
Secondary/ matriculation	68 900
Tertiary : non-degree	14 000
Tertiary : degree	10 100
Total	94 100

Note : Numbers may not add to the total owing to rounding.  
Source : General Household Survey