



**YOUNG
WOMEN'S
TRUST**

SUMMARY REPORT

YOUNG, FEMALE & FORGOTTEN?

FINAL REPORT

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Emma Mckay, Young Women's Trust

FOREWORD

Iris, 22, took part in our research interviews in Manchester. Her health has always prevented her working.



I don't think 'Economically Inactive' is a good way to describe people. It focuses on what people don't have and doesn't consider how much people might have to offer. I think young women should be given more of a chance to show their potential.

As a young woman with a disability it's really difficult to find a job. I think people with disabilities are seen as incapable of having a normal life let alone having a stable job.

Not only is it difficult to find a job but the money I get from benefits is not always enough to pay all the bills as I live on my own. A lot of the time I get left with nothing or no food to eat so I'm forced to have to beg to relatives for some help which I hate. I don't think there's enough understanding that not everyone is lucky enough to have a healthy relationship with their family. In my case it's not the best so if I can avoid asking for help I do.

I don't have all my qualifications because I have been in and out of hospital a lot which had a big impact on my education. But that doesn't mean I don't have the capacity to have a career. It's not all about qualifications: it should also be about your life experience, patience and motivation.

In a lot of cases women give up on finding work after facing let down after let down. If there was someone who could support us, or give us motivation to not give up, that would help us to achieve our goals.

I decided to take part in the project because people need to hear more young women's stories and see the realities of our lives.

A lot of women go unheard and forgotten. I want to fight for a better future with more equality and acceptance, where we can be heard.

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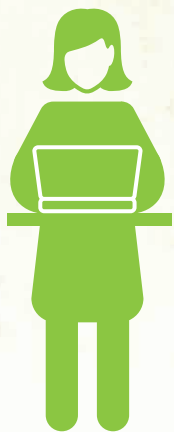


INTRODUCTION

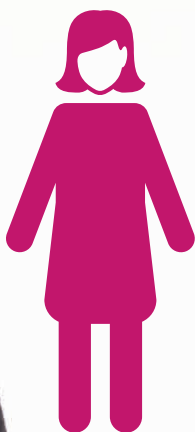
This summary provides an overview of the findings from a major two-year research project that Young Women's Trust has carried out into the issues faced by some quarter of a million "economically inactive" (EI) young women whose needs, skills and aspirations have been long overlooked.

In the most comprehensive study of its kind, led by Professor Sue Maguire of the University of Bath and supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, we have analysed a wide range of data, spoken to policymakers and service providers and carried out interviews with young women themselves. Our research found a consistent picture of young women who were juggling responsibilities and struggling to make ends meet – but who largely were not getting the support that could help them to thrive as well as survive, or any recognition for their contribution to society.

We hope that this report becomes required reading for all of those with an interest in transforming opportunities for young people, especially young women who remain disproportionately likely to be EI and left without the right support. And, most importantly, we hope that the report stimulates lasting changes that will benefit young women, their families and the country as a whole.



**ECONOMICALLY
ACTIVE:
UNEMPLOYED
AND SEEKING WORK**



**ECONOMICALLY
INACTIVE:
UNEMPLOYED
NOT SEEKING WORK
OR ABLE TO IMMINENTLY START WORK**

BACKGROUND

Nearly 800,000 young people across the UK aged 16-24 are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They fall into two categories. They can be unemployed and seeking work, in which case they count as economically active (EA), and are mostly young men. Alternatively, they are out of work but not able to look for work or start a job quickly. The latter group are recorded in national statistics as EI and mostly comprised of young women. At the time of writing, there were 275,000 young women EI compared to 190,000 young men.

In 2016, Young Women's Trust, working with Professor Sue Maguire of the University of Bath examined the background to economic inactivity. Professor Maguire investigated what experts knew about it, what policy and literature existed around it, and together we completed five case studies about support services for young people who were EI. Our report published at the end of 2016 confirmed that economic inactivity was 'an under-researched black box' in need of analysis¹. The key findings from the first year of the research were that:

- Despite the fact that they are not regarded as jobseekers, 29% of young women NEET and EI said they would like to work now and 86% thought they would work in the future.
- NEET young women could be divided into two groups, EA and EI, that matched the conditions attached to claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). This meant that they received quite different treatment from Jobcentre Plus (JCP), with EI young women having very little contact with or support from Jobcentre Plus staff.
- Local practitioners and national policymakers were concerned about the high numbers of young people who were 'unknown' – not 'in the system' but not in formal education, training or employment. The data bore out their concerns. Only three quarters of young women who are EI are claiming IS or ESA and only two fifths of EA young women are claiming JSA.
- Specific services for NEET and EI young women were lacking. In our case study areas, we encountered only one service that was designed to reach EI young people. There was also uncertainty about funding streams for projects supporting young people NEET, some of which stemmed from fears of losing European Union funding like the European Social Fund.

¹ Maguire, S. & Mckay, E. (2016), *Young, female and forgotten?* London: Young Women's Trust.

BECOMING EI

In 2017, we have turned our attention to the EI young women themselves through:

- Using Understanding Society data to create a model of the hazard of young women becoming EI.
- Conducting 57 in-depth interviews with young women across a number of different localities. They were recruited from local and national charities who were working with NEET and EI young women, meaning that our findings may not apply to the most isolated or unsupported EI young women.
- Holding an event for policymakers, service providers and young women to co-create the final recommendations.

This summary contains some of 2017's main findings. The full, final report, including references and a detailed methodology, is available on the [Young Women's Trust website](#).

Among those young people becoming EI after time spent working or actively job-seeking, the Understanding Society survey enables us to explain why young women are more likely to become EI than young men. A combination of circumstances and personal characteristics of a young person account for the different outcomes between the genders. They are gender; age; having a disability or long-term health condition; living with a child; and having poor mental health.

When allowing for the combined effects of all factors, new mothers and young women who live with a dependent child are both six times more likely to become EI than other young women. Yet, while these factors have no effect for young men, disability affects them rather more. Having a disability or long-term health condition makes men 76% more likely to become EI, but women 57% more likely. Young people of both sexes who have poorer mental health also have a higher hazard of becoming EI.

Experiences of education

The journey to becoming EI often began at school. A number of young women described experiences of bullying (either as the bully or the bullied), exclusion or dislike of learning in a classroom environment.

Nonetheless, most of our sample went on to post-16 education, where they tended to 'churn' between Level 1 and Level 2 courses in stereotypically feminine vocations, such as health and social care, childcare and hairdressing.

'Oh yes. You're either bullied or you're a bully. It's not an in between kind of thing ...I was bullied definitely... Yes, it was horrible. I was either skipping school because I did not want to go or I was hiding in a corner because I just hated being there.'

*(Ellie, 17)**

*All young women's names have been changed to protect their identities.

Those young women who dropped out of education usually did so after the age of 16. For the most part, dropping out was either due to the course not living up to the young woman's expectations or because of a change in the young woman's circumstances.

Reasons given for ceasing full-time learning could include one or a mixture of mental or physical health problems, caring for parents, pregnancy and childcare, drug and alcohol dependency, and homelessness.

The analysis of Understanding Society data demonstrated that even if a young woman has qualifications, these do not protect her from becoming EI. Young women with degrees are subject to the same risk of becoming EI as young men who have left school with no qualifications.

Training and employment

There was little evidence of young women leaving school or vocational courses and going straight into full-time work. This raises questions about the usefulness of their qualifications in local job markets. Those in our sample who went into apprenticeships either left or were asked to leave because of pregnancy, or did not secure jobs with the employer with whom they trained.

YOUNG WOMEN WITH DEGREES ARE SUBJECT TO THE SAME CHANCE OF BECOMING EI AS YOUNG MEN WHO LEFT SCHOOL WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS




NEW MOTHERS AND YOUNG WOMEN



WHO LIVE WITH A DEPENDENT CHILD

ARE SIX TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BECOME EI

*'I was at *****, the milkshake bar. So, I was on my feet constantly. So when I was 20 weeks pregnant, I think it was just before 20 weeks pregnant, so I was trying my hardest to work, and they were just like 'No, we can't keep you on.' ...It was awful because like...my manager was the first person to find out I was pregnant. She was really supportive at first and was like, we'll do everything to support you. And then it was fine for the first two or three weeks and then they just did not care anymore.'*

(Kerri, 19)

If young women had experience of paid work this was usually in low-skilled jobs, often with precarious or casual conditions, secured through agencies or relatives. Jobs included working in factories, pizza bars, cinemas, shops or football grounds.

BEING EI

Understanding young women's everyday experience of being EI is important. It prompts policymakers and service designers to consider how interventions, work and study could fit in with young women's motivations and the practicalities that they are having to juggle.

Weekly and daily routines

Patterns in the young women's days were based around their main reasons for being EI: being a mother, a carer, in poor health or in transition between education and employment. In this research, we have labelled young women 'in transition' if they were out of work and in part-time alternative provision or occasionally seeking work, but would not meet the job search requirements for claiming JSA or were ineligible due to their age (under 18).

Young women with caring responsibilities found that those caring duties dominated their days. Mothers spent a lot of time feeding, bathing, dressing and playing with their children, as well as cooking, cleaning and shopping for essentials. Likewise, those caring for relatives took on housework as well as helping and supervising their relatives' basic needs.

'So generally – Monday I'll get up, get (name of child) ready, take him to school... generally I make breakfast for her [her mother], she's so exhausted all the time. She's so worn out and tired because she can't afford to take the time off to have surgery she needs ...usually I'll just do the things that I can do to help her, so I feel like I'm constantly... It's like I'm on a treadmill... Then I pick (name of child) up and I cook for all of us as well and that's just generally what I do day to day... I'm trying to go out and see people more because otherwise I'm just keeping to myself too much which isn't good, it's never been helpful for me.'

(Gabriella, 18)

Health conditions, especially mental ill-health, fluctuated in their symptoms and prevented young women from keeping regular routines. Like carers they often spent much of their time at home and found that their health could interfere with forming friendships and relationships. Young women with mental illness often expressed dissatisfaction with the medical care they received.

'I can't really say because of my depression; it plays up sometimes, sometimes it doesn't. I can take the tablets and that for it but half the time they don't work, half the time they do.'

(Jess, 19)

Once again, young women 'in transition' between education and work spent most of their time at home or spending time with friends, going to the park or to other people's houses. Occasionally, they would apply for jobs, but not enough to count as full-time job-seeking or to meet the conditions of JSA. Some picked up caring responsibilities or volunteered in their spare time.

Family and friends

Most of the sample named family (often mothers), cohabiting partners and partners' families as core sources of emotional and practical support, although young mothers living with their families sometimes mentioned clashes between personalities within the home or over shared space and resources.

Nonetheless, family tended to be named over friends as a source of support. Young mothers, carers and those with health problems often found it difficult to maintain friendships. Those young women who were estranged from their family and had few friends could become quite isolated.

Where relationships with parents broke down, or family were not living in the same country or city, several young women related how this disrupted their lives because it pushed them into unsuitable or unsafe housing. It was common for them to find that the alternative of children's or adult social care systems had not offered a stable environment.

'It does impact your life, it really does, because you get put in one place and you think oh, that's it. They move you again. So, you don't really get that much time in one place to settle... To be honest, I just really want Social Services to stop moving me... Let me settle down, get myself sorted out before they move me again.'

(Hayley, 18)

On the other hand, where there was adequate alternative accommodation available in the event of family or partner relationship breakdown, young women were better able to take advantage of employment and skills support offered by charities.

Money

The amount of money that young women had available to them was affected by a number of factors: age, access to welfare, the type of benefit or support young women received, whether they lived in their own household or with family, and whether they received support from family and friends. Sources of income included:

- family
- charity expenses or bursaries for attending educational courses
- casual work (such as babysitting)
- severe hardship payments from JCP
- the local authority (for those young women who were under local authority care)
- state benefits.

In terms of welfare, not all EI young women claimed benefits, but, of those who did, claims were made for IS, Child Tax Credits (CTC), Child Benefit (CB), Universal Credit (UC), ESA and Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Several young women were meant to seek work full-time, but were unable to meet their conditions because of their health or caring responsibilities.

Financial wellbeing could often be dictated by whether a young woman was under or over 18 and whether or not she had children. This in turn was connected to their eligibility to benefits. Those under 18 with children were entitled to fewer benefits than those aged over 18 with children and raised it as an injustice.

'They said that it was because of my age and because of the benefits that I claim. When I turn 18 – because I get less than what everyone else gets, because I'm under 18. So, when I turn 18, I get £150 a fortnight instead of £115, which I don't get at all. I'm in the same boat as everyone else, it's just my age.'

(Zara, 17)





Although young women often needed support when completing the forms to apply for benefits, once benefits claims were 'up and running', the receipt of payments was relatively stable. In contrast, distress and suffering were brought about when the young women had their benefit applications turned down or delayed, when they had to appeal decisions or were sanctioned, or when they had to be reassessed because of a change of circumstances.

'So, I was on a joint claim and I didn't know this was going to happen but he went to jail so all my benefits stopped but they just say that it's my fault that he's done that. Then you've got to wait ...I was skint for weeks and I had a four-month-old baby, but we got things, like food parcels and stuff... Yes, they stop your Housing Benefit, they stop everything and even I didn't know. I just went home when it happened ...so being on a single claim is much better and he had loads of debts as well!'

(Sophy, 21)

Those claiming benefits with children to support and, especially, those living alone, faced the greatest level of financial hardship. Stringent budgeting was a key feature of their daily lives and their children's needs were at the centre of their expenditure.

Spending was much more chaotic among young women over the age of 18 who were not in receipt of welfare support. In some cases, they relied on unpredictable casual earnings from their partner (or ex-partner) or from picking up casual and cash-in-hand work themselves. What all the women in the sample had in common was their low expectations. They were reconciled to their limited finances until such time as they could find work.

LEAVING EI

Aspirations

'I want a life where I'm stable: [where] I've got a house on mortgage, I've got a nice car, my daughter's got everything she wants. I want my daughter to have her bedroom nice, everything. I want her to feel like she's everything.'

(Ayesha, 18)

The young women hoped to move into meaningful work in their local areas. They aimed to get jobs so that they did not have to rely on welfare support or family and friendship networks. Those living at home with parents and seeking work were frustrated that their job-seeking to date had not yielded returns, but the group facing the greatest challenges in this were young mothers. Setting aside the high cost of childcare and the reality that most young mothers would not be better off financially from working, a number of the mothers were anxious about leaving their pre-school children to go to work. Even though they disliked the stigma and poverty associated with being a young mother and claiming benefits, they did not expect to work until their children reached school age.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has led to 17 recommendations, which are listed below and addressed to the stakeholder with existing responsibility for each policy area or for bringing others together around relevant policy.

Department for Education

1. The Department for Education should develop a far more in-depth understanding and knowledge of the NEET population and the appropriateness of the EA and EI labels.
2. Data on NEETs, unemployment and economic inactivity should be collated nationally and published in an accessible way by age, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity for 16-24 year-olds.
3. A Ministerial Champion, preferably from the Department for Education, should be appointed to drive forward policy around economic inactivity and bring together the agenda where it straddles different departments. An immediate initiative should be the setting up of an Independent Review to examine the different needs and requirements of the 16-24 NEET group.
4. The government-funded 30 hours of childcare a week for 3 and 4-year-olds must be available for those parents who need it most, including those on zero hours contracts, apprentices and students, and childcare providers should be properly funded to offer it.
5. Care to Learn should be extended to 20-25 year olds and to all young parents aged 25 and under who are on apprenticeships.
6. Post-16 education and training providers need to offer greater levels of support to returning students, in particular young mothers.
7. The ongoing review of technical education and the impending roll-out of T levels in England needs to address the high incidence of 'churning' between Level 1 and Level 2 vocational courses; establish clear pathways to achieve higher level EET outcomes; and consider why too many young women are still locked into stereotypical and poorly paid vocational areas.
8. The DfE's new Careers Strategy should establish: early intervention programmes in schools; access to impartial, gender-aware information, advice and guidance (IAG); work experience; and the availability of mentors to tackle NEET EI rates.

Department for Work and Pensions

9. The DWP should enhance the support given to young people who are classified as NEET and EI due to childcare, caring responsibilities or physical and/or mental health issues.
10. DWP should lead on developing a new offer of one-to-one personalised support/mentorship to engender external contact for young women and to promote their wider social and economic engagement.
11. EI young women should be involved in designing the services that are created for them.
12. In order to support young women quickly and effectively when they need help, support services should have a flexible approach and be financed by sustainable, rather than time-limited, funding.
13. The DWP needs to address the financial precariousness that surrounds applying for or changing welfare claims, including UC, by reducing the time taken to process claims. Advance cash payments – grants rather than loans – should also be offered to those young women who are at risk of destitution while waiting for new claims to be paid.
14. The DWP should increase the amount it pays in benefits to young women and phase out the age-related differential payment structures within IS and UC.

Education and Skills Funding Agency

15. More support should be given to young women who become pregnant during apprenticeship training, in order to reduce drop-out rates and to develop flexible and accessible re-entry routes. Other changes should include increasing the apprentice national minimum wage, renewing guidance on part-time apprenticeships and promoting the potential for part-time apprenticeships.

Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

16. Far greater attention needs to be given to creating high quality and sustainable job opportunities. The Industrial Strategy should prioritise investment in jobs and skills for young women. Flexible working hours, adequate pay to make coming off benefits worthwhile, and affordable and flexible childcare would also encourage young women to leave NEET and EI status.

Charities

17. Urgent policy attention and intervention, involving inputs from young people's charities and mental health charities, should be targeted at young women (and young men) who are in the NEET and EI category due to anxiety and depression.

THANK YOU

Funders

Barrow Cadbury Trust
Sir Halley Stewart Trust
Rosa

Interviewees

All the organisations who recruited young women for us to interview and those who were interviewed: policymakers, service providers and young women.

Staff and researchers

Dr. Nicole Martin, Dr. Ricky Kanabar and Raj Patel at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex for their work on the Understanding Society data.

Prof. Prue Huddleston and Prof. Rob MacDonald for reviewing the research.

Emma Feasey and Lydia Morgan for support recruiting and interviewing young women.

Emma McFarland (eMc Arts) for designing and facilitating the co-creation event to develop the recommendations.



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Young Women's Trust is the operating name of YWCA England & Wales.
Charity number 217868. Company number 137113

