Situations of Social Network of Jobless Youth and Assistance Measures

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Introduction

In Japan in the past, the transition of young people from school to work was made fairly smoothly. Young Japanese made efforts, while they were still at school, to seek out the next organization they would belong to, such as a higher educational institution or a workplace, and successfully shifted to the next stage. Since the 1990s, however, corporate demand for new graduates has dropped, so that – also partly due to a change in the outlook of young people – an increasing number now weave to and fro among employment, unemployment, NEET (not in education, employment or training), and part-time employment.

Studies so far suggest that such young people are classifiable into five patterns: those who seek momentary pleasure in their lives; those who have lost contact with society; those who do nothing, daunted by the difficulties; those who have lost confidence; and those who are waiting for a better chance.

With ways of transition changing, it is the young part-time workers known as freeters that have attracted most social attention since the mid-1990s. At that time, a considerable number of studies were made, according to which half of such workers actually worked as long hours as regular employees, and not a few of them, on reaching their late 20s, settled down in a particular workplace, though it was still part-time. Japan is still counted as one of the countries where the wage and other gaps between full-time workers, who work under indefinite-term labor contracts, and part-time workers are quite large, and there is a need to redress the treatment of freeters who work as much as regular employees.

Another focal point drawing attention in recent years is young people who, in the course of vacillating, frequently choose neither to work nor study.

Contents:

I. Locus of problem and purposes of this paper

The purposes of this paper are to comprehensively investigate the relationship between the social networks and job-searching activities of young people who are neither in work nor in education, that is, NEETs, by referring to various case studies, and to discuss possible assisting measures. Five typical patterns were cited above in relation to the background and factors which are likely to put young people in a difficult situation while they are at the transitional stage (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training [2004]). This paper pays particular attention to networks of young NEETs, since a series of recent studies have shed light on the fact that an outstanding feature is their isolation from other people, that is, their poor social networks (Genda and Maganuma [2004]). However, research on this issue done so far has put emphasis on the problem of communication - that is, some young people become NEETs because they are not confident about achieving good relationships with other persons; little attention has been given to the role of their social networks and their relationship with their employment.

Traditionally, most important studies on social networks in Japan have dealt with, and explained the functions of such networks when workers already having one job search and find another one. Where job-switching is concerned, for example, it is well known that personal networks or introductions, apart from public or private outplacement services, work effectively. Granovetter shows that white-collar workers in the U.S.A. often succeed in changing their jobs through weak ties, rather than strong ones (i.e., close friends, family members, or relatives) (Granovetter [1998]). With their Japanese counterparts, strong ties play a positive role in their job-switching activities (Watanabe [1991]). Concerning the functions of social networks for young people in the transitional stage, a "Survey on

Working Style of Youth" carried out in 2000 by the Japan Institute of Labour serves as a good reference (Japan Institute of Labour [2001]). The survey, while omitting to observe the quality of the social networks in question, found evidence that a large proportion of freeters who have succeeded in getting jobs as regular employees relied on connections with their relatives and friends, rather than Hellowork or job information magazines. This suggests that social networks work effectively in the shift of status from freeter to regular employee, too.

While social networks are effective in finding jobs in Japan, regardless of the type of network, Chae and Morishima [2002] stress that the fact that the channels for job-switching may be restricted, from the beginning, by the circumstances of the individual, is more important than the quality of the social networks available in determining the success or otherwise of job-switching. In other words, Those who are most vulnerable in the labor market – women, and middle-aged and elderly unemployed persons – have no social networks which are highly likely to yield favorable results, and thus are obliged to make use of the formal routes open to everyone who wishes to change jobs. This makes it clear that it is necessary, when considering the relationship between social networks and the job opportunities of people vulnerable in the labor market, to consider ideal forms of social networks, apart from the relationship between the two variables.

This paper aims, as its first task, at providing a clear, comprehensive picture of the relationship between social networks and job opportunities for young NEETs. Since people in a disadvantageous position do not have any social networks useful in switching jobs, as indicated by previous studies, it can be assumed that NEETs, likewise, do not have such social networks. Such being the case, assistance open to everyone, not personal social networks, is required to be as effective in the job-finding activities of NEETs as in those of females and middle-aged and elderly persons who are in a disadvantageous position. In line with this, this paper, as its second task, aims at identifying what supports NEETs, or could do so, in finding jobs in a manner complementary to social networks. This involves an investigation of the effectiveness of recently launched public measures to assist young people.

However, social networks are of significance for NEET young people not simply because they serve as a device to increase employment opportunities; they also serve as something which youths can count on in making decisions and also as social ties through which youths can obtain psychological backing in addition to practical support[1]. Social networks are of importance to young people not only because networks act as a direct bridge between them and employment, but also because networks can support them and expand their future prospects. Thus, as its third task, this paper attempts to find how social networks support young people.

II. The social networks of young NEETs

Data used in this paper are from a survey conducted between 2003 and 2004 by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, and available in "Young People in Transitional Crisis (interim report)," Research Report Series No.6 (51 young persons were interviewed; for details, see the research report)[2]. This interview survey was mainly directed at young people who were facing various difficulties at the transitional stage; thus survey results cannot give a direct answer for the question concerning what kind of social networks were effective for those neither in work nor in education. Still, the survey findings enable us to track the paths that the subjects had followed, so that the findings are useful in understanding the dynamics of their social networks; how the young people formulated them, and how they affected job-finding activities. At the same time, the survey discovered some cases where the young people had given up, if not permanently, their NEET status, or had some future prospects. Such findings will help to identify possible supportive measures.

Judging from the fact that an unstable situation is likely to shrink an individual's social network, the survey records are classifiable, in terms of the time when individuals lapse into an unstable situation, into: "the group with isolated social networks" who have little contact with people apart

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[1] Okita defines social networks as places / worlds where individual young people live their everyday lives, and where many people exist in close interaction.

[2] In many cases, the persons surveyed were introduced through assisting organizations or schoolteachers, so that the survey samples include the NEETs, who are most likely to rely on the assistance currently available. Studies concerning those who are not attracted to the existing assistance may be left to other papers.

from their family members; "the group with limited social networks" who belong to personal networks consisting of local persons of the same age; and "the group with expanding social networks" who have connections at various levels and are disposed to expand their human relations[3].

The overall picture reveals two obvious facts; first, young people can lapse into a transitional crisis for various reasons. Junior-high school graduates and dropouts are, in many cases, subject to unstable employment situations, but it sometimes happens that even those who have a high academic background and work experience encounter a crisis. Second, it is observable that the types of social networks defer depending on the stage at which the persons in question left school. For example, those who have left school at an early stage, in particular males, tend to stay in a tightly knit local community of close friends only (limited networks). On the other hand, those who have left school at a relatively late stage tend to form their social networks through personal relations at school. Among the individuals surveyed, many in this category seem to find human relations bothersome, have no close friends, and have human contacts only with family members (isolated networks). Observed in detail, their social networks take in fact different forms, but have a shared tendency – that is, their coverage is fairly small.

While the general picture reveals the foregoing tendencies, it does not give any clue as to how the natures of different social networks have different impacts on the job opportunities of young people. Hence, the next section is devoted to a number of case studies, and a comprehensive examination of the nature of social networks of NEETs, and their job opportunities[4].

Case 1: Male, 24, junior-high school graduate, has given up regular

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[3] According to a classification by Granovetter, there are a number of studies which aim at classifying social networks into various groups and investigate the relationship with employment. For example, Carson categorizes social networks of unemployed persons into "isolated," "limited (constrained)," and "expanding", and concludes that the exit rate from unemployment to re-employment is higher in the descending order "expanding," "limited," "isolated" (Granovetter [1998]). This paper refers to the classification of Carson, but uses each term in a different sense.

[4] Statements of the persons surveyed are preceded by a dash, whereas questions asked by the interviewer are in square brackets with question marks.

employment

In present-day Japan, compulsory education requires nine years up to junior high school, but the majority go on to high school. Despite the extraordinary high advancement rate to high school, 97 percent, some do not; their human relations are confined to friends from junior high school within a small local community, so that they have few opportunities to expand their future prospects.

Case 1 concerns a man who had been back and forth between *arubaito* employment, a type of part-time employment, and the NEET state but gained a future prospect on the occasion of getting a job through adults in his community, that is, through his social network, and expanding his network by entering a vocational school.

He spent much time socializing with local friends, seldom attending his junior high school, and did not wish to go on to high school. Because of arguments with his father, he started to live on his own after graduation from junior high school, but returned home after one year. He took on a job, arranged for him by his school, immediately after graduation, but he gave it up within six months due to friction with his superiors, resulting in a life back and forth between *arubaito* and NEET. During this period, he was promised a job as a regular employee, but left after oversleeping on the very first day; and he even lost an *arubaito* job because of oversleeping. Despite all this, he had not questioned his own lifestyle.

At the age of 19, an *arubaito* job was arranged for him by an adult acquaintance and he took it on. He worked diligently, and was promoted to regular employee, but gave it up at the age of 21 because he decided to enter a vocational college to study music. He recalls that this helped him expand his personal relations, which had been limited to local people, and to change himself:

-- Since I changed when I took up music, I just cannot give it up. To put it differently, I feel comfortable now. I cannot give it up, too, because I feel I've got to get into it more - to find a new part of myself.

[When you say that you changed, how?]

It's about my attitude. More than anything else, I think that by meeting people I've learnt good manners, and got to know myself. Through talking to people, I can see myself. It's quite different (from the life I led when I

was at junior high school). I have conversations with my parents quite often nowadays.

[Does music help you in that way, too?]

Yes, it does. At the moment, I am working as an *arubaito* worker; I know it will be difficult to make a living in the music industry, but, hopefully, I would like to get a job which has something to do with music in the future.

Case 2: Male, 22, in "free school" after graduating from junior high school

This man, now 22, often played truant when he was at junior high school. But, stimulated by his colleagues at the free school he attended after graduation, he started work as an *arubaito* worker, but encountered various troubles such as the bankruptcy of a shop he worked for, and ended up as a NEET. He resumed work as an *arubaito* worker, and developed self-confidence by finding contemporaries with shared problems at an institute assisting youth. Now he is preparing himself to get a regular job.

He had refused to go to school as a first-year student at junior high school, and started a shut-in life, passing his time reading or playing TV games at home. In his third year as a student, he began attending a free school at the suggestion of his classroom teacher. Although the teacher recommended that he should go on to high school via correspondence course, he decided to continue going to the free school. At the age of 17, having learnt that there was somebody at the same free school who was doing *arubaito* work, he took on an *arubaito* job arranged by his relatives. As an *arubaito* worker, he worked for a small bookshop for two years, but the shop went bankrupt. Just around the same time, his family' finances deteriorated, and he gave up going to the free school. He could not afford a vocational school, and decided to study on his own for a certification examination in the hope that a certificate would give him a chance to work even without much schooling. However, he gave up the idea as his parents recommended that he should start work immediately. He took on a part-time job as a night-shift manager at a 24-hour "convenience store," but was demoted to an ordinary *arubaito* worker due to a change in policy of the shop, which discouraged him enough to make him quit. He more or less

wasted his time for six months before resuming a part-time job at a different convenience store, and occasionally visiting an institute assisting young people. Pleased with getting communication with other job-searching persons in a similar situation and beginning to gain confidence, he is preparing himself to look for regular employment:

-- Seeing other people working hard to get a job has made me feel that I have to pull my weight too. Talking to them about my problems, what I did and how I felt, and listening to them in turn was quite encouraging. We can sometimes help and give advice to each other. I feel a sense of relief when I talk about myself to someone else. More than anything, I find great pleasure in talking to people in the same situation, and can feel that I've changed quite a lot since I visited there for the first time.

Case 3: Female, 20, gave up high school halfway through

Upon dropping out of high school, this girl drifted from job to job, all of them *arubaito*, and became an unmarried mother. But then, through an *arubaito* job arranged by a public placement service, she learnt the difficulty and pleasure of work, and still holds the job without being distracted by friends who remain NEET and are still playing around.

Wishing to expand her circle, she had gone on to a high school far away from her home. Despite good relationships with friends at school, she happened to have an argument with a particular friend, which developed into a punch-up, and left school halfway through because she had become "tired of" school life. After giving up school, she drifted from one friend's place to another, doing short-term temporary jobs to raise money. At the age of 17, she became an unmarried mother simply because "she wanted to do as people around her were doing." At the time the baby was 2 years old, she started as an *arubaito* worker at a public child-care organization to which she was introduced by her father, and is still working there. While her current job is not physically demanding, she finds it difficult to keep an eye on the children, and to cope with relationships of rank within the organization, but has acquired a decent attitude to others. Seeing friends who remain jobless and are doing as they please, she sometimes has an urge to give up and return to the old life, but since she feels that the current

temporary job suits her, she is determined to carry on with it.

Case 4: Female, 20, unable to find a job after graduation from high school

Although she studied hard at high school, she was unable to find a job after graduation since there were no desirable jobs in her home area, the Tohoku region. Currently, she works in an office – her own choice – on an *arubaito* basis, but has failed to develop personal contacts and has no particular friends to go out with.

She chose a high school which was supposed to be advantageous in finding employment after graduation. She performed quite well academically at high school, lived a diligent school life, and started job searching in due course. She talked eagerly to schoolteachers and made efforts in, for example, getting hold of various information not shown in job advertisements officially distributed to the school, but she could not find any satisfactory opening for a clerical job, and eventually did not take any employment examination. Although she was not promised a job before graduation, she succeeded in obtaining an internship program provided by the prefecture, through which she got a clerical job, though on a part-time basis with a definite contract term. In the meantime, she made frequent visits to Hellowork but was never able to find any satisfactory clerical job, she says. After expiration of the contract term, her former schoolteacher put in a word for her, and the firm she had worked for under the internship program arranged to find her a different company with a part-time clerical job opening. Although she leaves office early in the afternoon, she has no friends to go out with after work, since most of her friends from high school currently work as regular employees or have left the hometown to go on to higher education. So she returns home right after work and most often spends the time playing with her niece. She wishes to work as a regular employee, but she is still uncertain about the future. Upon graduation from high school, her social network shrank, but there is no prospect of it expanding.

Case 5: Male, 19, high school graduate, has given up regular employment

The man in this case study refuses to take on a job because he wants to

stay with the social network he currently belongs to. In other words, this is a case where a social network itself puts a limit on the scope of activities of a young person. If one belongs to a social network comprising local friends, it is only high school that can provide information concerning the outside world. Although some (including Mimizuka [2000], etc.) claim that the function of schools, which used to play a significant role in the social networks of young people has been weakened nowadays, school still has a certain impact on their social networks.

This man, uncertain whether he should go to a vocational school or a high school after graduating from junior high school, first thought of acquiring a good set of skills rather than studying. But since the majority went on to high school, he followed them. He did not choose the high school carefully, but led a serious school life because his parents were strict on him. When he was in the second year, his father became incapacitated; with nobody to talk to him strictly, he was frequently late to school because he "felt somehow going to school was a bother." After graduation, he started to work as a cook, which the school arranged for him as he himself wished, but gave it up before long since he was expected to live far away from his hometown and did not want to be separated from his friends.

After quitting, he led a life of getting up around early afternoon, playing "pachinko" a Japanese pinball game, and playing around with friends without getting even a part-time job. Currently, having been badgered everyday by his parents to work, he is cleaning fish on an *arubaito* basis. Although he gave up the first job, he still wishes to work as a cook and asks his former schoolteachers to keep him posted about such jobs: as this case shows, school serves as an assisting body even after a graduate has given up the first job. The subject is also encouraged by advice from mature persons in his current workplace as an *arubaito* worker:

-- I am still thinking of studying to get official qualification as a cook, so I have my ear to the ground concerning the qualification system, and for other tips. To enter a vocational college may be one good way, but it costs a lot, doesn't it? Even so I hear that you can get a sort of approval from your boss to sit the examination for qualification if you have worked decently at something like cleaning

fish, for a certain number of years. I think that if I get the approval
I'll make up my mind to stick to this.

[How did you get that information?]

From a schoolteacher. And also from a teacher in charge of career
guidance, superiors at my workplace, and so on.

[Did you yourself decide to visit your school?]

Yes. I went there to get advice. When I was in the previous job, too, I
went there once for advice before quitting, telling them that I was quitting
because of such-and-such a reason, or something like that. Just once. There
are some things you can't tell your parents about, don't you think? You
can't tell your parents, but you can tell somebody else. That made me feel
much better.

[So, they're fairly helpful?]

Yes, fairly.

Case 6: Male, 24, dropped out of university

Without considering human relations or his future, the subject gave up
his university, where he'd got into thanks to recommendations. Then he got
the idea of working as an editor, and enrolled at a vocational college,
though he wasn't yet confident about getting a job. After a number of job
interviews, he began to be aware that he had a problem with
communication skills, made efforts to change himself, and finally got a job.

In this case study, he says that he had moved with the crowd and had no
particular problem until he entered university, though he had always
avoided thinking carefully about bothersome human relations and his future.
Judging from his own academic record, he had not expected to get into
university; he did not even know which was more suitable for him, the
humanities or the science course. But when given the possibility of
admission via recommendation to the department of engineering at a
university, he took it. He would have done nothing had he not gone on to
university, he recalls. From the second year on, however, he stopped
attending lectures, though continuing to go to the university, when students
were required to take an increasing number of lectures and courses on
special subjects. Then when he found that he had not earned sufficient
credits, he decided to withdraw voluntarily from university.

Soon after the withdrawal, he showed an interest in editing jobs and made up his mind to enroll in a related vocational college. However, while searching for a job prior to graduation from the college, he realized that he had no confidence about plunging into human relationships at a company, and became timid before getting involved too much. Nevertheless, after graduation, he continued visiting companies, if not so enthusiastically. But then he suddenly realized, while having an interview, that the will to do something is definitely more important; that the important thing is to be aware of the meaning of working decently in society, rather than to think about what to do; and that it is essential to have proper communication skills and something more to prove your commitment, rather than brooding over, for example, human relations in the workplace. Since then he has tried to behave more positively. Currently, he is doing a short-term temporary job while seeing various kinds of people via introductions from lecturers of the vocational college, making efforts to acquire communication skills, and engaging in job training. He believes that he took a major step towards a job as an editor after that interview.

Case 7: Male, 25, graduate from a vocational college, has given up regular employment

The status of NEET is not an exclusive feature of young people who have no work experience. There are young people who, after having worked once as a regular employee, end up being neither in work nor in education. The subject in this case has made various efforts to expand his social network, but they have not necessarily borne fruit.

This young man got employed at a company which had nothing to do with his specialty which he acquired at the vocational college, and suffered a nervous breakdown because of violence by his superior, which led to his giving up the job. He did not have many friends from the beginning. His mother, apprehensive that he might get shut in, encouraged him to be active; he attended an actor's school, and went out for long walks with somebody in the same age group whom he met on the Internet, though he was as yet neither in work nor in school. Although he continued to be active enough to acquire qualification as a home care-worker, he had completely lost social contact with anyone except family members when he

was required to nurse one of them.

He had friends he could contact though mobile phone or the Internet, but when it came to friends he could meet face to face, he admitted that he had none. To find somewhere he could hide his solitariness and feel that he was not at least completely alone, he tried volunteer activities, but was refused to be called upon, and is now inactive. Nevertheless, he is trying to rebuild his human relations by attending school to obtain a qualification. He sees school as a breakthrough towards getting rid of his sense of stagnation.

Case 8: Male, 27, failed to find a job after graduation from university, found a job later, but gave it up

The subject took active steps to find employment while he was in university, but failed. After graduation, he decided, following counseling with an assisting organization, to switch course, aiming to become a civil servant, and passed the exam for a post, but quit the job before long. He tried an examination for a different type of civil service job in vain, and is currently working part-time.

Upon the death of his mother while he was at junior high school, he was obliged to take responsibility for the housework, at the same time going to a high school far from his home. Because of this, he spent most of his high school life going back and forth between home and school, and had little time to go out with friends. He did not produce a satisfactory result in entrance examinations for university, but later or subsequently transferred to the department in which he was interested, and in due course took up job-searching activities. He set out to get a job in the publishing business, because he did not wish to engage in sales and believed that there was no sales activity in that business. He found interviews terribly difficult: "Excruciatingly painful – worse than the punishment in hell where you walk on a bed of great thorns," he recalls. He had interviews at 80 or so companies in all but was promised no job in the end. Looking back on his job-searching activity, he says that he just continued the activity without conducting any satisfactory self-analysis, and ended up exhausted. He had no one he could talk to.

After he gave up looking for jobs, he visited a youth assisting

organization. Through their counseling, he began to feel like trying the civil service examination again.

-- In the first place, I really felt resistance to sales activities. On that point, I just wouldn't compromise. So I wondered what to do and asked for advice. I visited an organization assisting young people in the transition, and other counseling service centers. As I talked to them, I began to feel that the civil service might be a good idea, and for the first time, it came into my head as a possible future course.

He switched course, passed a civil service examination, and got employment. But he immediately quit because he could not get on with his superior. He tried another civil service examination but failed at the interview stage. Now he works as an *arubaito* worker, with a possible opportunity to be promoted to regular employment; he is still pondering which course he should take, to strive for the promotion to regular employment or to try the civil service examination again.

Case 9: Male, 24, university graduate, quit regular employment

This subject got a job but gave it up, and is currently in vocational training. His primary concern is that he has no close friends; he feels that he could manage job-hunting better with such friends.

He had been bullied since he was at primary school and was seriously bothered about human relationships. Absence from high school for a certain period because of illness made him more shut-in. Graduating with difficulty from high school, he went on to university after spending one year preparing for entrance examinations.

He entered the department of engineering and was fairly active – for example, in doing part-time jobs. He found it rather difficult at first to communicate but had acquired friends to talk to in the latter half of his campus life. He engaged in activities to seek a job after graduation, making active use of support from the university. But although he made efforts until the last moment in this job-searching activity and was promised employment, once he started to work he could not get used to it, and left the company in what was virtually dismissal. Currently, he is in vocational training.

Although he has a strong will to work, things have not gone well for

him. As he says, his current concern is that he has no close friends, and he believes that everything might change if only he could make and get along with some. He feels that the failure in his social network is a great obstacle in his way to employment.

[What do you do with the friends you go out with at the moment?]

-- Well, actually I've no such friend at the moment. So the problem is that I've no one I can meet in private life. I suppose that's the biggest problem at the moment. I've a feeling that I'd be able to manage other things all right if only I had one or two friends.

Case 10: Male, 26, university graduate, has given up regular employment

This subject lost confidence when he lost his job, resulting in a shrinking of his social network, but regained self-respect through a youth assisting organization, and is currently taking active steps.

He went on to university without any particular problem and started his job-searching activity earlier than usual with a strong determination to work immediately after graduation. His efforts paid off, and he was promised employment while still in university. Although he worked hard, he was obliged to leave the company at an early stage: officially he quit on a voluntary basis, but he says that in practice it was virtual dismissal. He was extremely worried right after loosing his job, and had a tough time:

-- I was beginning to think I'd never be able to find another job. Partly because I couldn't even manage the previous job, I cannot help feeling that I won't be able to fit in anywhere. You see? I made every effort but couldn't make it in the previous job, so…

He did not feel like contacting friends when he was seriously worried, but began to get his hard experiences in perspective when he met various people at a youth assisting organization, which he at first dropped in quite casually, and talked to them about his experience:

-- When I started going here (the youth assisting organization), I found many people whom I could talk to easily about, say, the fact that I had a job, what kind of work I did, and so on. Through such conversations, I managed to put aside the past inside myself, and gradually began to put things in place. I got be able to talk about myself, and bit by bit feel more positive. Up until then, in fact I

hadn't talked to people so often.

[Have you met friends so infrequently then?]

-- Well, seeing friends didn't cheer me up very much. It was not until recently that I realized it's important to talk to somebody when you're in trouble. Talking gives you some ideas, maybe not clear, about your future. It helps you clarify something hidden inside yourself. It's not just because I've had vocational counseling here, but anyway I got to be able to organize many things which had existed inside myself. As a result, I've discovered something new and got the courage to move forward.

In case study 10, the subject managed to expand his network with people in the same young generation whom he met at the assisting organization, though his network had been confined to his family members until then. He is continuing expanding the scope of his network by, for example, visiting the job-searching office at the university which he graduated from, even though he did not rely on it while he was a student and looking for a job.

III. Special features of social networks and assistance

The following special features are deduced from the above 10 typical cases concerning the social networks of NEET young people:

1. Three patterns of social networks

The following three typical patterns are observable in the social networks of NEETs: an "isolated social network" which is observable in many cases among those who have little contact with other people, and possess high educational backgrounds; a "limited social network" observed among those who are content with close ties within a local community; and an "expanding social network" seen among those who are eager to expand their human relations. Of these, a vast majority of NEETs belong to either a "limited social network" or an "isolated social network[5]." The studies in the

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[5] For lack of space this paper does not discuss "expanding" social networks in detail, but gives some cases for reference in Table 1. Persons with social networks categorized in this type are capable of creating their social networks for themselves without official encouragement. Where young females are concerned, some problems are likely to be

previous section show that a "limited social network" does provide young people with emotional support but at the same time constrains their activity. The young man in Case 5 refused to continue a job because he did not want to move far from his local friends[6]. At the same time, as seen in Case 3, young people with this type of social network see whether "everyone (people around them) does it" as a crucial criterion in making decisions, and are likely eventually to end up in transitional crisis[7].

2. Supplementary functions for the expansion of social networks

The analysis of case studies highlights the fact that formal assistance through, for example, school, public employment and public organizations, augments networks which are classifiable into the "isolated" and "limited" categories. The analysis also shows that adults who are familiar with young people play an effective role in supplementing the function of their social networks.

(i) Assistance from school

Assistance from school has a great impact on the social networks of young people who have little work experience. It is frequently stated that school plays a significant role in assistance in the transition of young people, but in many cases this refers to the fact that school gives direct, practical assistance for employment by offering skills and qualifications, and by job placement services. The focus here is, rather, the fact that a school helps those who belong to it expand their social networks. Unlike friends in local communities, people with whom one made friends at school present, varied senses of values, and thus contribute to the expansion of the social networks of the young persons in question (as seen in Case 1)[8]. Advice from schoolteachers will be encouraging for young people who have no access to information from adults apart from family members (as

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concealed because some of them officially claim that they are so-called domestic helpers; careful investigation is required.

[6] This pattern was observed in more than one person interviewed.

[7] Okita suggests that young people should build up their social networks to give themselves more alternative choices.

[8] In the case of five same-sex classmates, they all live in an extremely similar society and share similar experience in their lives, so that the network comprising only such friends provides information concerning a very small world (Yasuda [1997], p. 64).

seen in Cases 5 and 6).

(ii) Public employment

Some municipalities seem to give up the creation of public employment with limited contract terms on the grounds, they claim, that it only improves the employment situation so long as the contract terms last. With the case studies dealt with in this paper, however, it was effective. In case 3, a young person who had been temping just for immediate cash was given public employment involving a certain degree of discretion and responsibility and began to ponder the meaning of work without being distracted by old friends who were still playing around and served as her sole criterion for making her decisions. In case 4, the presence of public employment prevented a young person in an area where there were few employment opportunities from lapsing into NEET; instead, she was offered a job which she really wished to do. Although most of these job opportunities are not continuous employment, public employment, especially where the employment situation is severe, it can be expected to be high-quality enough to foster the possibilities and abilities of young people even if such jobs created by public organizations are only on an *arubaito* basis.

(iii) Public organizations

The efforts of public organizations in artificially creating social networks can be of great value as forms of employment assistance. The existence of places where young people can meet others of the same generation to share problems with, and talk to, is certainly encouraging for them; in some cases (Cases 2 and 10), they gained confidence and moved on to actual employment. In another case (Case 8), counseling services at a public organization enabled an "isolated" young man who had no one to talk to intimately to look at different possibilities for the work and obtain employment[9]. A common feature of these cases was that a large proportion of young people with a higher educational background made use of public

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[9] This will apply also to young people with "limited" social networks who have access to limited information.

organizations (Cases 8, 9, and 10). A survey of assisting organizations backs up this fact (Kosugi and Hori [2003]). But at the same time, Hellowork was taken advantage of both by young persons who left school at an early age, and by those with a higher educational background. This seems attributable to the fact that a majority of those with high educational qualifications who make use of public organizations tend to have "isolated" networks and are looking for somewhere to go, so that they tend use assisting organizations which in fact supply such places, while a majority of those who have low educational backgrounds tend to have "limited" networks with stable, if limited, human relationships, so that they are likely to look for employment as a direct income source, rather than a place to go.

(iv) Employment on an *arubaito* basis through references

Employment on an *arubaito* basis through references from acquaintances – adults in the local community (Case 1); a mature family member (Case 3); and relatives (Case 2) – seems to carry a positive image concerning the working life to young persons, perhaps because somebody who knew both sides arranged the jobs. This route to employment is not necessarily open to everyone, but references from adults who know the young persons in question prove effective.

3. Causes of the shrinkage in social networks

The survey has shown that various events can trigger the shrinkage in social networks. Not only departure from school or workplace but also the need to nurse parents, the death of close friends or relatives, and mental instability may diminish such networks. In Case 5, a young man lost support from his family because of the incapacity of his father, and refused to go to school; in Case 8, a man was obliged to engage in housework because his mother had passed away, and spent most of his time going back and forth between home and school, which left him little time to go out with friends[10]. Currently, there is no effective way to rescue young people

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[10] Of the total of 51 persons surveyed, quite a few are from unstable family backgrounds: parents of eight are divorced; of three, remarried; and of seven dead. For details, see the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training [2004]. While financial difficulties may be resolved by, say, scholarship programs, psychological assistance due to the loss of family members is not readily available under the current administrative scheme.

in these circumstances. At the same time, it is quite difficult to enlarge social networks which have already diminished, while there are some cases, such as Case 7, where the young persons themselves actively look for a place to go but are rejected. In either case, there is a need to take steps to prevent their social networks from diminishing.

IV. Conclusions

This paper has given some insight into the social networks of young people who are neither in work nor in school. Since it confines its analysis to a limited number of case studies, it may be somewhat difficult to see the findings as representing absolute general situations. Nevertheless, two facts can be derived from the case studies carried out.

First, social networks of NEET young people are classifiable into various types in terms of the stage at which they depart from school education, and by gender. In general, males who have left school at an early age dwell in a "limited" social network, small but tightly knit, in the local community, whereas females who live in areas where there are few opportunities to find jobs belong to an "isolated" social network. On the other hand, many males who have stayed in formal education for a long period have few contacts with other persons except for their family members – and are typically classifiable into an "isolated" social network.

Second, in these networks, school, public organizations and public employment play a significant role in compensating for their vulnerability.

"Limited" social networks back up young people and, at the same time, put restrictions on their activities. Public employment and school, on the other hand, offer experience and information which young people would not have access to in their normal life, enabling them to expand their future possibilities and prospects. Getting employed in a public organization, for example, is a unique experience for many young people and leads to the expansion of their social networks. A case study shows that a young woman who is continuing working in a public organization is not unduly influenced by the values of her local friends. Some claim that going on to higher education does not necessarily help in getting a job, but certainly does contribute to the expansion of the social networks of the young people

in question: it gives opportunities for social interaction with various types of people in the same generation, expanding their social networks and enabling them to see things from a broader standpoint, as seen in one case study. And for those who have left school at an early stage, schoolteachers still serve as a device to provide information and advice.

For youth with "isolated" social networks, public organizations' measures by public organizations to artificially create social networks seem to be effective. In recent years, as a part of youth assistance policy, public organizations have begun to provide young people with "places to go."

One case study in this paper shows that counselors and others who directly assist young persons in public organizations served as a bridge to young people, and also that the young people who came there mentally supported each other, resulting in the formation of new social networks which gave a momentum for them to move forwards towards employment. In such cases where "places to go" are supplied by public organizations, staff members in charge of assistance at such public organizations are required to encourage young people to find employment (for example, Kudo [2004]).

The evidence summarized above suggests the following points:

The first is that advantage should be taken of school as a starting point for the transition. The assistance supplied by school is now less influential than before, but it still has a great impact on young people in some regions. One possibility is to give it the status of starting point for assistance, explicitly endorsing its role as a bridge to other assisting organizations.

Second, artificially created public employment open to young people has a measurable impact. Although some are critical, it served, at least in the case study in this paper, as a device to give them time to think about the future; to prevent the occurrence of NEETs in regions where the employment situation is severe; and to give the young opportunities to experience jobs which they wish to take. In the future, one possibility would be to initiate a transitional labor market policy to create opportunities for them to engage not in paid employment but in training and volunteer activities, or to increase youth employment via social services. In sum, various activities, apart from paid employment, should be taken into greater account in assistance policy.

The third point is the necessity for "comprehensive support." So far, institutions involved in social education have been responsible, as one of their activities, for assistance in forming social networks, and had little connection with assistance in youth employment as such. However, according to the evidence of this paper, which has investigated social networks from various angles, in many cases the formation of appropriate social networks effectively helped young NEETs get employment. In order for young persons to acquire the ability to formulate social networks for themselves, assisting measures need to work on problems which existed prior to the occurrence of the employment problem. And analysis of the case studies suggests that this approach will also serve as employment assistance in the longer term. What is required in future is assistance comprehensively combining these existing measures, and to apply it to individual young persons at an early stage.

In the meanwhile, many youth theorists claim that the social networks among youth as a whole have been diminished. It seems vital to consider the relation between social networks and employment as one part of problems pertaining to young people as a whole.

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