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Is the rise of Involuntary Celibacy Extremism a threat to the safety of the United Kingdom?

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Abstract

This paper will examine whether Involuntary Celibacy extremism is a threat to the United Kingdom. The word 'incel' refers to a person who identifies as involuntarily celibate, who is unable to form intimate and sexual relationships. Many are predominantly young males, around 18 to 30 years old, and in the past twenty years, the community has seen a huge rise. The incel community has also begun to advocate an increasingly violent, misogynistic ideology, where blame is placed on women and society for their inability to form a romantic relationship. The number of deadly attacks with the perpetrator either having strong links to the incel community or having openly claimed the attack for the incel community has increased. Research has also risen, examining why people turn to the incel community and how these people become radicalised. Many findings demonstrate that negative mental health patterns have a huge impact on turning men to this community. In addition to this, the reach of social media is allowing these people to connect and spread the incel ideology. There is clinical research that tells us that these community members have difficulties in social settings and forming relationships; this is then worsened by the changing dynamics of contemporary society. There is clear evidence that the factors that turn people towards the incel ideology are on the rise, so it can be recognised that it is likely to see significant growth in the coming years. Countries across the world are reacting, but this is still in its early phase, and a better understanding of the community and its threat is needed if this is to be managed moving forward. There are comparisons between the international community and the UK in how governments are responding to this threat within this research project. International cooperation will be valuable to share and learn good practices when preventing the threat of extremism by the incel community.

The paper will assess the current and future risk to the United Kingdom (UK) posed by incel extremism. It will explore current understanding of individual incel personality traits, their communities and the developing ideologies through analysis of research journals, predominantly produced in Western society. The research will delve into the factors that lead a person to become an incel and what may drive the growth of this ideology in the future.

Keywords: *Incel, Involuntary Celibates, Toxic Masculinity, Extremism.*

Introduction

Overview and Context

Hostility and hatred of a person based on gender is unfortunately not a new phenomenon, with female discrimination enshrined in British legislation from the early 19th century. Throughout much of the Victorian period, gender inequalities created an environment in which women rarely had the opportunity for their voices to be heard, whether in the political or domestic space (Krause & Roth, 2011). The political challenges to the 'status quo' that began in the early 20th century have led to improved protection within the workplace and at home, through Acts of Parliament that demand society develop procedures to challenge toxic attitudes.

'Incel' refers to a person who identifies as involuntarily celibate and was first used in 1997 by a female Canadian undergraduate in a blog designed for both men and women who were experiencing issues with developing healthy romantic relationships. However, the term has since evolved and has been adopted by predominantly heterosexual men who feel isolated from society (Aiolfi et al., 2024). The growth of the incel movement has run in parallel with the pace of technological advancement, with the connective power of the internet and social media, allowing those with similar ideological perspectives to meet and chat easily without challenge, creating an absence of critical thought (Eckkrammer, 2025). In 2003, love-shy.com was created, which provided an online platform for individuals who felt rejected by the opposite sex or were extremely shy with potential partners. Unlike other forums such as Incel Support, which welcomed men and women and banned misogynistic posts, love-

shy.com largely catered for males only and did little to curb the increasing level of female hate speech (Bates, 2021). Over the next decade, love-shy.com's membership grew rapidly, linking up with other far-right and fringe groups, to create an underground membership of users who shared violent and degrading content; a community of like-minded ideologues operating in a space that has since become known as the 'manosphere' (Sugiura, 2021).

This space has now grown to incorporate hundreds of platforms, where content is both created and shared. There has been a disturbing number of incidents in which some of those who subscribe to this emerging ideology have moved their 'rebellion' into the physical environment, with several attacks occurring in the USA, such as that committed by Elliot Rodger in 2014.

Many who identify as an 'incel' claim to be unable to form romantic and sexual relationships with women due to genetic factors and societal changes that they believe have disproportionately benefited women (Tastenhoye et al., 2022). In addition, the incel community is unwilling to take responsibility for their perceived place in society, with misogyny and anti-feminist rhetoric being a core part of their ideology. They often view themselves as victims, indicating they are frustrated with their situation, portraying celibacy as something imposed on them by external factors, primarily blaming women for their predicament (Aiolfi et al., 2024). A core theme within incel ideology is the 80/20 theory, which suggests that 80% of women are only attracted to the top 20% of men, with incels believing they have no hope of ever being a part of this small group. This viewpoint isolates, leading some to form a fatalistic opinion of society (Sparks et al., 2023). Within this 80/20 theory, incels refer to the 20% of men as 'chads' and to the 80% of women as 'Stacey's'. 'Chads' are seen as hyper-attractive and successful men who are at the top of the social structure and have free choice of women within the 80%. 'Stacey's' are depicted as superficial women, ultra-focused on their appearance with low moral standards, only willing to pursue intimate relations with the attractive males to improve their social level (O'Donnell & Shor, 2022). A core fragment of incel ideology is their acceptance of 'lookism' and the fact that they believe they have lost the genetic lottery. Many incels showed significant levels of self-consciousness and attribute their failures in intimate relationships to weight, height, bone structure and musculature (Stijelja & Mishara, 2023; Broyd et al., 2022b).

The Rise in Incel Extremism

As mentioned previously, the evolution of the movement has seen several lone acts of mass violence committed by men who either demonstrated incel ideology or were actively involved with incel groups, the first of which was committed by a man called Elliot Rodgers (Rozdilsky & Snowden, 2021). Elliot Rodgers murdered six people and injured 12 in a violent attack using guns, a hunting knife and his car. Before the attack, he released a manifesto to justify his mass violence, where it can be inferred that it was committed due to his hatred for women and to eradicate sex and love (White, 2017). Within the manifesto, Rogers describes a happy childhood but then feels increasingly isolated and rejected as he grows older. He resented women for rejecting him and men for their ability to attract women. Rodgers believes he was entitled to love and attention, but this was unattainable due to factors outside of his control. His loneliness and rejection turned into intense hatred, where he craved revenge. He thoroughly planned his attack to punish those he felt had wronged him. The manifesto also highlights his struggles with mental health, including feelings of inadequacy, depression, and self-consciousness about his body image. Moskalenko et al. (2022) note that Rodgers does not mention the incel community or ever define himself as one; however, his attack and manifesto have now become deeply rooted in contemporary incel ideology.

There have been other acts of mass violence committed by men demonstrating similar beliefs, including the Toronto Van attack by Alek Minassian, where he killed 11 people and injured 15. He identified himself as an incel and notably took inspiration from Elliot Rodger’s attack. His motivations were also identified as romantic and social rejections (Rozdilsky & Snowden, 2021). Most notably, there was the mass murder committed by Jake Davison in Plymouth, England, where he shot and killed five people, including his mother, with a legally owned shotgun. Like Rodgers and Minassian, Davison displayed misogynistic and incel related views, which he regularly posted online. After an investigation into Davison’s online presence, it was discovered that he claimed that women chose their sexual partners based only on physical appearance, which he believed prevented him from fulfilling his 'right' to have a 16- or 17-year-old girlfriend. His writings also examined the ‘black pill’ ideology, which is common in incel ideology. Derived from the 1990s film, The Matrix, taking the ‘black pill’ suggests that some have accepted their fate that they will never be able to form

intimate relationships, and there is nothing they can do to change this (Moskalenko et al., 2022).

The Driving Factors of the Incel Community Growth

Several factors have been identified in scholarly literature which explain the rapid rise in popularity of the incel movement since 2010. Firstly, the continuing unregulated expansion of social media and chat forums has created spaces for toxic attitudes to form unchallenged within cyber communities (Sparks et al. 2023). The nature of the online environment allows members to share and reinforce one another's beliefs, often amplifying the feelings of isolation many already feel (Aiolfi et al., 2024). Sugiura (2021) suggests that the # MeToo social campaign, which is designed to raise awareness against sexual abuse and violence, has been a factor behind the growth of the incel movement, with many seeing the increase in gender equality as a challenge to their discriminatory attitudes towards women. As such, many followers of the Incel movement have chosen to amplify their own strategies to disrupt any attempt to empower women and girls to challenge toxic masculine behaviours (Lamb, 2023).

For many at the extreme of the Incel movement, gender empowerment has meant that women are no longer dependent upon men for social or financial status, allowing for other qualities to be prioritised, suggesting they can be more selective when choosing intimate partners (Palma, 2019). The ideology suggests that this positive progression is, in fact, a negative, arguing that men will feel excluded from meeting someone based on a perception of being an 'inferior' social status (Lamb, 2023). Sugiura (2021) argues that such ideas are fundamentally at odds with how healthy relationships form amongst consenting adults, objectifying women whilst undermining the importance of trust, commitment and mutual respect within a loving partnership. Lamb (2023) suggests that incel ideology often evidences the outperforming of females over males in both schools and universities, alongside higher levels of male unemployment, as evidence of the erosion of male dominance, with women feeling able to develop their own status outside of men. These toxic attitudes present men with examples of unhealthy relationships, controlling rather than loving their partners, who would be left powerless to protect male egotism (Watson et al. 2025).

Alongside these macro changes, many individuals belonging to incel communities struggle with mental health issues, including depression and social anxiety. These micro conditions can worsen feelings of rejection and inadequacy, with many choosing to adopt incel ideology as an explanation for their conditions rather than seeking professional support (Watson et al. 2025). A survey that examined the personal beliefs of members of the incel community found that 95% of 274 participants believed they had experienced some form of depression, while 94% also provided feedback suggesting they had experienced anxiety in their lives. When compared to a nationally representative survey, incels reported remarkably high measures of anxiety and depression (Moskalenko et al., 2022). MIND (2020) shows that with suicide rates in men doubling between 2009 and 2020, alongside a 6% rise in men feeling low or worried, many are choosing to embrace incel ideology as an unhealthy coping mechanism, with gender hate forums becoming platforms in which to make connections to manage significant mental health concerns.

Regardless of the reasons for the growth in toxic incel ideology, it remains clear that such beliefs are based upon an unhealthy perception of relationships, in which men are encouraged to take from rather than love their partners equally. Instead, the narrative demonises any attempt to create gender empowerment, reinforcing a perception that women are property of a male.

Research Method and Strategy

The research design has used secondary research of qualitative studies, focusing on thematic analysis of contemporary literature to understand incel ideologies, their association with extremist behaviour and the factors that drive men to the community. Thematic analysis allowed the author an effective method to systematically produce strong qualitative research findings by identifying and analysing key topics within the data (Saunders et al., 2023). The paper assessed the risk of these factors worsening, potentially leading more men to the incel community, and thus heightening the risk of further extremist acts of mass violence. The data collected was from various sources that have been reviewed for their academic credibility, relevance to contemporary society, and pertinence for policing in the UK. The data was collected from sources, including academic articles and websites. Key

terms, like incel ideology, incel extremism and factors causing men to turn to incel communities, were used to identify the main body of the project. Topics were then discovered from this research, which has led to further investigations into men's mental health, social media influencing extremism and changes to social dynamics. These topics were then examined for their potential impact on the growth of incel communities and extremism. The data was analysed and categorised into themes such as incel ideology and its connection to mental health, the role of social media in incel community expansion, and the implications of rapid changes in Western societal culture.

Incel ideology and Mental Health

The available literature on this topic shares several common outcomes. A high number of incel community members report several mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, loneliness, insecure attachments and in some cases autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many of the men have turned to the ideology after several experiences of rejection in both intimate and social settings. They seem to turn towards the incel community for a sense of belonging and support; however, these predominantly online spaces are full of misogynistic and violent rhetoric. Additionally, the misogynist ideology has sprouted beliefs such as that men believe they have a right to a woman and, in some cases, a right to sexual activity (Lindsay, 2022), for which much of the blame has been placed on the victim, as they cannot achieve this. Hateful comments are common across incel spaces, and there is concern that these areas are becoming an environment for the radicalisation of community members. Bates (2021) shows that men within the incel community report that they are against violence, with few going on to commit any acts of mass violence. This shows that implementing a targeted mental health approach would be beneficial to address both the ideological and psychological troubles that these men face. This model, common within counter-radicalisation practice, would treat the incel community as a terrorist group, with some suggesting that this will have a negative effect by criminalising these groups (Broyd et al., 2022).

Shahid et al. (2020) provide a detailed history of the incel community, suggesting that incel philosophy is centred around the fact that social structure is a hierarchy in which incels are at the bottom. They argue that incels believe that women hold all the

power in intimate relationships and that they will only seek males based on height, weight, musculature and social status. Further to this, key driving forces of incel philosophy have been identified as entitlement, victimhood, jealousy, misogyny and fatalism. Fatalism theory argues that a person may view life as predetermined and that a person is powerless to change it (Shahid et al., 2020). This seems to capture well the likely thought process of an incel that they have and will be forever rejected by women, creating long-term depressive thoughts.

Broyd et al. (2022) argued that a significant proportion of incels report suffering from depression, anxiety and autism. These types of mental health issues are likely to make a person vulnerable to engaging in the incel community and potentially adopting extremist views. The study examines high-profile cases, concluding that mental disorders are often a contributing factor. Broyd et al., (2022) study examined 274 self-identified incels from across the world who completed an online survey. The results found that 67% reported depressive symptoms, 48% reported frequent thoughts of suicide, and 60% reported symptoms of anxiety. Within the study, conclusions were drawn that the incel community reinforces these negative thought patterns; however, many of the participants thought that their interaction with the community provided them with a safe space within the community where they could discuss their thoughts with like-minded people (Speckhard et al., 2021). Many of the mass violence incel attackers were known to mental health services. Elliot Rogers was a long-term sufferer of autism, and Jack Davison's mother was trying to get him referred to mental health services for a potential autism and ADHD diagnosis.

Broyd et al. (2022) further noted that a substantial link between mental health and incel violence. The work identified a link between the mental health issues, the incel community and the violent risk factors that can then develop, suggesting that maladaptive thinking from an incels perspective can lead to thoughts of mass violence and extremism. Additionally, it identified the role of rejection and hopelessness, in line with an irrational blame towards women, which correlates with thoughts of violence. Sparks et al. (2023) conducted exploratory research into incel mental and relational well-being, with a focus on their dating app experiences and how this has caused them to self-identify as an incel. The study recruited 38 male incels and 107 male non incels, where the average age was within their early twenties. The men who participated were asked a range of questions relating to their dating app experience and their mental

well-being regarding their thoughts on their relational situation. For example, one of the sample questions required participants to scale from 1-5 how anxious they were about being single for the rest of their lives. The key findings from the mental well-being scope characterised incels as showing higher levels of depressive symptoms, increased rejection sensitivity, greater relationship status influence and more insecure attachment patterns. It is also important to note that the study found incels were more likely to have autism, which was either clinically or self-diagnosed. Further studies have identified a correlation between incel presence and: higher male to female populations in a geographical area, regions with smaller gender pay gaps, limited social networks and areas with reduced employment opportunities. Academic literature has shown links between low self-esteem and violent relationships. The study highlights that existing literature tells us that low self-esteem is predictive of violent relationships. Gündoğmuş et al. (2023) found that there is a 36% variance in insecure attachment between violent and non-violent men in a domestic setting. Other studies have suggested that there are significantly higher jealousy and anxiety levels in male domestic violence abusers compared with male non-abusers in heterosexual relationships (PRIOLO FILHO et al., 2019).

Many members of the incel community face mental and sociological strains that lead to violent behaviour, suggesting that clinical intervention will be an important tool to deal with the issue. The work of Broyd et al. (2022) is unique in gathering data directly from men who self-identify as incels. One advantage here is that it has collected findings directly from men within the incel communities, in comparison to many other studies where the framework tends to be based on online forum analysis. The paper has utilised a comparative approach between incels and non-incels, providing clear findings that have been used to measure the psychological variability. There are well-documented findings that identify specific psychological issues and problems regarding social isolation, which are then highlighted as crucial intervention points. Through a critical perspective, the study size of the group was small - 38 incels participated; this creates limitations, with the statistical data produced lacking depth and could cause overgeneralisation. This sample size provided a limited analysis of the incel community, preventing the findings from producing clear conclusions. Furthermore, the study did not provide information as to where participants were located; only that they were recruited from online forums. The study recognised the

importance of social culture and its influence on incel members; therefore, when suggesting intervention strategies, it would be difficult to apply these without understanding the environment in which members live and work. Lastly, due to the lack of geographic information regarding the location of participants, it remains difficult to apply this to the entirety of the UK. It would be necessary to understand if these findings could be applied, allowing targeted prevention methods to be established, which could be used to challenge the growing incel threat.

Jackson et al. (2023) found that there are rising levels of psychological distress in the UK, with 18-24-year-olds showing the steepest increase. It found that 18–24-year-olds reporting psychological distress rose from 13.6% in December 2021 to 20.2% in 2022. Using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, a 10-item questionnaire was used to measure depressive and anxiety symptoms; a method used by national health surveys across Australia (Kessler, 2003).

Jackson et al. (2023) conducted data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely to have had a significant effect on a person's mental health, exacerbating the results. Additionally, there was no pre-pandemic baseline data, so it is difficult to interpret whether the steep rise was consistent with previous years. It has been reported that the majority of incel members are in the age range of 18-30 (Woodward et al., 2021). Increasing mental distress amongst the male population could lead to more men searching incel communities as a method to manage their concerns, using forums to share their frustrations. It is necessary to recognise that younger people are at risk of turning to the incel community, with more attention needed to develop prevention methods to address this growing problem.

Tackling the Threat of Incel Violence

Throughout policing both in the UK and overseas, the incel community is regarded as a concern due to the threat of violence and extremism. There remains much debate as to how to tackle the rising threat of incel-inspired violence, with debates centred upon whether the ideology should be designated as a terrorist threat. It remains evident that counter-terrorism strategies, most notably 'Prevent', continue to take referrals for at-risk individuals who are vulnerable to techniques used to radicalise me into becoming part of the incel community. Most referrals come from

schools where misogyny and sexist behaviour are already prevalent, suggesting a strong link between those fostering unhealthy relationships and incel attraction (Meuller & Evans, 2024).

Whittaker et al. (2024) conducted one of the largest surveys of incels, interviewing 561 participants across the UK and the United States. The study identified that many participants were in their mid-twenties, predominantly heterosexual childless men, from middle or middle/lower class backgrounds, with mostly post-secondary school education. The study explored violent attitudes in its participants and observed that 25% sometimes justify violence, with 5% frequently justifying violence, although a large proportion did not justify violence at all. Advocates for the movement argue that the incel community should not be treated as terrorists, as they do not see violence as a necessary means to defend the group. The lack of a universal international definition for terrorism provides further issues when tackling the question as to whether incel movements can be identified as such, with it remaining unclear if such individuals or groups aim to influence government, or international governmental organisations or to intimidate the public through serious violence, destruction or intimidation (Bates, 2021). If followers of the ideology carry out acts of violence, this is often dealt with by legislation prohibiting murder/attempted murder or bodily harm rather than evoking counter-terrorism legislation (Townsend, 2022).

However, much of the online behaviour of incel communities does meet the UK's definition of extremism, which states that: *"Extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance"* (GOV.UK, 2024). This has led to counter terrorism policing increasingly applying legislation to arrest and detain those who they feel are a cause for concern. The Terrorism Act 2000 and its subsequent revisions give the state considerable powers to protect communities from harm, including Section 5, which makes it an offence for a person to engage in the preparation of acts/attempts of terrorism, or to assist others in the preparation of acts of terrorism. Under such powers, incel groups or those of membership to the ideology who were engaged in such acts could be arrested and charged (cps.gov.uk, 2025). Section 58 makes it an offence to collect or make a record of information that is useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism, or to possess a document or record containing information of that kind. As Incel publications continue to rise across the virtual space, with many advocating the use of

violence to influence domestic politics, it makes it possible for counter-terrorism legislation to be used against producers and distributors of such materials (Bates, 2021).

When analysing the recent UK Counter Terrorism Prevent statistics, the number of referrals for incel related concerns was particularly low at just 1.2% of all referrals. However, 68% of these referrals were adopted by the Chanel Panel – this is the highest adoption rate at the Chanel Panel compared to all other extremist threats. There are some limitations to this, as the participants were self-selecting, which may not provide a full representation of the full incel community. Although the number of incel cases is low, the risk should not be underestimated. With such examples, there should be recognition that the incel movement could be countered under hate crime legislation, to enhance the protection of women and girls. The incel community is growing, and so there remains a need to update legislation to counter the violent rhetoric being shared online.

VAWG and Tackling Incel Violence

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is any act of gender-based violence or abuse that causes, or is likely to cause, women and girls physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering. It includes a wide range of harmful behaviours, such as domestic abuse, sexual violence (including rape and harassment), female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, stalking, child sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. The VAWG agenda attempts to bring together multiple agencies to share information, intelligence and approaches to protect women from male violence.

Since the 2010-15 Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition, subsequent governments have continued to enforce measures to End Violence Against Women and Girls, introducing new offences for controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking, 'revenge porn', and ‘upskirting’. In addition, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (‘the 2021 Act) has strengthened protections for those who have experienced abuse and harm, whilst also increasing the sentences for those who commit these offences. Such reforms to legislation and wider organisational commitment to tackling the spread of materials which promote violence against women and girls have been significant in driving the rise of incel ideology. The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Code

of Practice provide guidance when tackling such ideologies in the digital sphere. This includes recognition of technology-facilitated abuse (activities carried out with the use of communication equipment, including hardware and software), enabling abusers to stalk, harass and control victims. The Code of Practice is also rooted in international standards and obligations for the prevention of VAWG. Article 5, paragraph 2, of the Istanbul Convention requires States Parties to take the necessary legislative and other measures to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of violence perpetrated by non-state actors (European Commission, 2021).

The rise of the incel ideology promotes ideas which would encourage rather than challenge violence against women and girls. In many cases, men are encouraged to physically and emotionally abuse their partners to achieve dominance over them, creating the conditions for offences against the person to be committed. In so doing, the VAWG strategy across England and Wales provides powers that organisations and law enforcement can use to challenge the ideology in both physical and online spaces.

International Approaches to Incel Violence

The interconnectedness of the modern world has allowed criminal gangs and promoters of extremist ideologies to spread their beliefs quickly and without challenge. Tietjen & Tirkkonen (2023) show that online spaces are complex and difficult to police due to the varying definitions of illegal, harmful or illicit behaviours. It is further noted that the treatment of women by men is also subject to social and cultural attitudes, with some countries allowing men to control and coerce partners, whilst being protected by secular or religious law (Bates, 2021).

Meuller & Evans (2024) compared the different approaches to the threat of incel violence by both the Swedish and UK governments. The comparative study examined policy responses and comprehensive parliamentary debates that have occurred in both countries. The research concluded that the UK had greater parliamentary engagement, but it lacked specific targeted approaches. This contrasted with the Swedish method, which had a clearer integration between existing counter-violent extremism strategies, in addition to a more structured response framework. This further demonstrates the lack of a universal approach to what is a global ideology, in which varying judiciaries have mixed views upon how such actions should be defined.

A large emphasis was placed on the violent incel ideology being spread through the internet, with both governments and social media companies failing to mitigate the reach of the violent rhetoric. The recent Online Safety Bill (2023) doesn't acknowledge the incel threat, which remains curious given the sharp increase in harassment, sexist comments and assaults shown towards female school pupils in the UK. The delayed action towards incel culture has led to the spread of violence towards women and girls. Further research is needed so that violent incel activity can be targeted through legislation and incorporated into extremist policies.

Tomkinson et al. (2020) examined the Australian government's approach to tackling incels' ideology. A clear difference between the UK and Sweden has been the Austrian state's acceptance that the ideology represents a threat to its national security. By securitising misogynistic violence, this has ensured additional resources are deployed when dealing with incel extremism. Tomkinson et al. (2020) advocate for a preventative strategy, suggesting that a better understanding will help to identify at-risk individuals, who can then be targeted to prevent the risk of radicalisation at an early stage.

Although the Australian government's approach could be seen as harsh, there remains a lack of discussion surrounding the negatives of implementing a securitisation approach to the incel ideology. As discussed earlier, it was reported that approximately 5% of the incel community advocate for violence towards women as an appropriate response (Whittaker et al., 2024). Additionally, the criminalising of incels could increase societal isolation, discourage the seeking of mental health support and push them further towards radicalisation (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021). The criminalising of a whole community may have the opposite effect and draw more attention to it, inciting more violence, mirroring other extremist groups when their beliefs become under threat (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Threat can often increase the extremity of their beliefs and feelings, which leads to more justification for violence against perceived threats.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) was established in 2011 to prevent and counter violent extremism across the European Union. Funded by the European Commission, its practitioners consist of police officers, prison staff, teachers and other professionals, who work directly with those who have been radicalised and

or deemed vulnerable to extremism (European Commission, n.d.). Their report in 2011 found similar results to the resounding literature, informing us that the majority of the incel community have significant mental health issues and struggle with social dynamics, including economic insecurity, perceived social rejection and difficulty forming relationships. The RAN (2011) suggested several actions that could be implemented to deal with the complexities of the incel community. This includes improved training for all frontline practitioners, not just those working in specific counter-terrorism roles. It also suggests that there should be a focus on combating the underlying issues, with a need for the development of an empathetic approach. Additionally, there is a recommendation for "demystifying sex and sexuality" amongst young people to improve their understanding of their own bodies and consent. Further to that, the study suggests that parents should be educated on online misogynistic terminology, so that this can be recognised and put right early.

Conclusion

As previously discussed, there is a significant amount of academic research that has explored the incel ideology and its strong links to mental health problems. The resounding literature tells us that a high proportion of the incel community has mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, regular thoughts of suicide, as well as ADHD and autism. Broyd et al., (2022) found significant quantitative data that incels self-report high levels of depression, anxiety and autism; the study then suggested that these specific mental health issues make incel members particularly at risk of being vulnerable to radicalisation. There is also mention in this study of how the incel philosophy and ideology spread on online forums, possibly exacerbating the problem due to the violent and misogynistic content which appears consistently. This was later supported by Sparks et al 2023 which also found, from self-reported data, that incels show significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms. Sparks et al. (2023) examined well-being issues, concluding high levels of social rejection and insecure attachment patterns. Gündoğmuş et al. (2023) also found that mental health issues remained a strong predictor of violence towards women and girls in domestic violence incidents. Incel community members are vulnerable to radicalisation, which is supported by Bhui et al. (2019), who found individuals with major depression with dysthymia were at a significantly higher risk of having sympathies for violent protest and terrorism. The strong links to negative mental health patterns and violent

misogynistic beliefs suggest a concerning risk posed by the incel community. Understanding these links will be critical in the early identification of individuals who are at risk of radicalisation, helping police units to implement early intervention plans to prevent attacks in the future.

The presence of negative mental health issues remains a starting point that leads a person, who bases their poor well-being on their inability to form intimate relationships, to the incel community and its ideology. Therefore, it has been relevant to examine what the trajectory was for the mental health crisis in the UK. The literature suggests that mental health problems are increasing at a concerning rate and, therefore, this will likely continue over the coming years. Jackson et al. (2023) found an increase in self-reported mental health issues across multiple age ranges in the UK, but there was a particularly steep rise in the 18–24-year-old community. It is important to note here that Speckhard et al (2021) found that the vast majority of incel community members were young men in Western societies. This implies that the incel community is likely to see a growth in its members shortly. The literature does tell us that the number of incel members is not a threat and doesn't justify violence, but with the community likely to grow, it is important to recognise that there will also be an increase in the minority that supports violence based on their ideology.

Ongoing discussions in the UK parliament about the threat of incels are highlighted, suggesting that the violent misogynistic beliefs embedded in incel ideology qualify as extremist views as they infringe upon others' freedom and fundamental rights. Although the UK government does not classify the incel community as a terrorist group due to a lack of evidence suggesting the group employs violence to defend and impose their ideology, the UK's counter-terrorism unit, Prevent, manages referrals from identified incels at risk of radicalisation, implying that the threat is recognised and deemed legitimate.

When examining the international response, European nations view and respond to the incel community in similar ways to the UK. Sweden has a comparable number of identified incel online community members, integrating responses more into their current counter-terror framework. Several countries are yet to develop specific policies regarding the incel community, but the UK parliament does discuss the topic more frequently. However, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, 2021) made several

recommendations to improve the UK response to incel violence, including further training for frontline community professionals to recognise the incel ideology quickly. Conversely, the RAN suggested adopting an empathetic approach towards members, emphasising the significant mental health issues within the incel community.

When examining the threat posed to the UK by incel ideology, governments must acknowledge the threat and facilitate early implementation of prevention strategies for those who may be at risk. This robust response can only be necessitated by increased funding and resources to detect and penalise those advocating violent misogynistic ideology.

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