Incels: A First Scan of the Phenomenon (in the EU) and its Relevance and Challenges for P/CVE

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Introduction

Involuntary celibates ('incels') refers to men who believe they are unable to access consensual sexual relationships due to their perceived physical unattractiveness. The online incel ecosystem contains violent misogynistic content, with members celebrating violence against women and societal-level attacks, such as the Isla Vista shooting in 2014. Attackers who have committed mass atrocities either explicitly or implicitly as a result of incel "traits" are canonised into the suite of incel "heroes". This paper intends to demystify key tenets of the incel ideology and its relationship to violence, outline key challenges for practitioners in prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) in reaching this community, and offer recommendations for intervention providers and practitioners to increase and improve work related to this phenomenon.

Part 1: Incel Ideology

Background

The incel community is part of the wider "manosphere" ([1]), a collection of anti-feminist, largely online communities engaged in varying levels of misogyny and, on occasion, targeted violence ([2]). The manosphere can be largely understood to have four distinct spheres: Pickup Artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), and Incels ([3]).

Men's rights activism is the oldest section of the manosphere and predates the internet. MRAs are interested in legal and political change and are focused on the perceived unequal treatment of men in issues such as divorce and child support allocations ([4]). Supporters of MGTOW advocate that men withdraw from normal interactions with women, including avoiding cohabitation, and maintain a strict hierarchy between genders ([5]). Alternatively, PUAs and incels are both focused on accessing sexual relationships with women. However, while PUAs believe that through a set of behaviours called "game" they can manipulate women into having sex with them, incels believe they are genetically and societally disadvantaged in such a way that they are denied access to sexual relationships with women.

The incel community was born online, and the online ecosystem has shaped its evolution. Online incel spaces allow these men to share the frustration, anger and pain they feel as a result of their reported inability to form sexual relationships and their perceived genetic inferiority. As these spaces have grown, incels have developed their own ideology and values, canonised their heroes and identified their villains.

Online incel communities represent a public health and public safety risk ([6]). Incels, in part, clearly advocate for societal change. They are angry with society and people engaging in sexual relationships and want tangible changes in the treatment of incels and the structure of social and romantic relationships. Without such societal change, incels' nihilistic world view means they believe that ultimately their position is immutable. This approach has helped to create an online environment of often angry, isolated, depressed and at times suicidal men ([7]).

A small number of incels have already demonstrated their capacity for societal violence, such as Alek Minassian's 2018 attack. Some incels have demonstrated their capacity to harm themselves through suicide and dangerous body modifications ([8]). There is a need for greater understanding of this community so that steps can be taken to help protect both its vulnerable members and society at large from incel-motivated acts of violence.

([1]) Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere.
([2]) DiBranco, The men's rights movement and violence; BBC News, 'Pick-up artist' Adnan Ahmed jailed for two years for threatening behaviour.
([3]) Bratich & Banet-Weiser, From pick-up artists to incels. The manosphere has also been described as including Christian Tradcon communities and parts of the geek/gamer culture community.
([4]) Ibid., p. 3.
([5]) Smith, Why Do These Straight Men Want Nothing to Do With Women?
([6]) VoxPol, Violent misogyny, mass murder and suicide: It's time we saved incels from themselves.
([7]) Moonshot, Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology.
([8]) Ibid., p. 6.

Incel Belief System

When the term incel was first coined in 1997, it was gender and sexuality inclusive. A website created by a female undergraduate student titled Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project was intended to be a place for individuals to share their frustrations over sex, dating and sexuality [9].

This included women who identified as incels [10]. However, over the following decade newly created incel websites began to develop their own unique culture of misogyny and hostility towards women. As this misogynistic discourse grew, the communities fractured, ultimately leaving the more extreme and misogynistic voices to develop the incel ideology we see today [11]. Modern incel online communities have a developed misogynistic ideology, are more extreme, and host discourse that celebrates mass killers and incites violence [12]. The modern understanding of the term is also gender exclusive and the incel community only recognises men as incels. Female involuntary celibates ("femcels") are not recognised by the incel community and most incel communities are not mixed gender. Femcel communities exist, but they do not subscribe to the same misogynistic ideology as incels.

Incels believe they cannot access sex due to three factors [13]:

1. Genetics

Incels believe they are physically unattractive and that this is a result of genetics and biology. While other factors such as wealth or status may improve a man's ability to access sex, they view physical attractiveness as the most significant factor in attracting a partner and, crucially, accessing sexual relationships.

The blackpill

Based on the 1999 film *The Matrix*, "pill" terminology is used by the far right and online misogynistic communities. According to incels, "bluepilled" men engage in conventional dating practices, while "redpilled" men reject feminist beliefs about the role of women and attempt to game the sexual marketplace in order to access sex [14]. The "blackpill" is the most nihilistic of the pill ideologies: it asserts that physical attractiveness is the only determining factor in accessing sexual relationships.

The blackpill is a core tenet of the incel belief system and views individuals' position in the **sexual marketplace** as unchangeable and assigned at birth. Incels believe that no amount of self-improvement or mental health support will affect their ability to access sexual relationships. **Looksmaxxing** (improving one's appearance through a range of methods including personal grooming, plastic surgery and steroid use) is discussed as an option within the incel ecosystem. However, looksmaxxing is believed to only be an option for individuals who are not **trucels**; the belief being that only those with very few incel traits can escape inceldom through looksmaxxing. Suicide is often viewed as an understandable and legitimate response to their position that they view as unchangeable.

Blackpill can be used as a noun, an adjective and a verb. The blackpill is a philosophy or world view. The blackpill is also an action that can be taken; to "blackpill someone" is to introduce them to research, evidence or arguments that support a "blackpilled" world view. A piece of research, a personal encounter or an individual can also be described as blackpilled.

2. Evolutionary process of women's mate selection

Incels subscribe to biological determinism and believe in evolutionary processes of mate selection. Incels believe women are evolutionarily predetermined to seek out the most physically attractive male through a process known as **hypergamy**. Incels cite hypergamy in support of their view that women are sexually

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[9] Hoffman et al., Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence.
[10] Taylor, The woman who founded the 'incel' movement.
[11] Ibid., p. 9.
[12] Ibid., p. 9.
[13] Ibid., p. 7.
[14] Moonshot, Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology.

selective and default to seeking sex with a small number of so-called **Alpha** men. Incels' interpretation of hypergamy posits that women would prefer to remain celibate than engage in sexual relationships with men who do not sit at the top of the hierarchy.

Incels believe this interpretation of mate selection is an evolutionary and biological fact and is therefore inalterable without the influence of external factors, such as societal structures.

3. Societal structures

Incels believe that, historically, societal structures were in place to control the hypergamous behaviour of women ([15]). For example, in the 1950s women often had fewer legal, financial, reproductive and personal rights than men; incels claim that women were forced to trade sex (through marriage) for personal security for themselves and their children. This structure, according to incel ideology, supposedly allowed all men equal access to sexual relationships. Incels consider that these structural limitations on women's independence acted as a control on women's innate hypergamous behaviour.

Incels also believe that greater freedoms and rights for women over the past several decades have enabled women to default to hypergamous behaviour, allowing them to reject sexual relationships with unattractive men. Incels refer to this as the **80/20 rule**, which is the belief that the top 20 % of men are now accessing sex with the majority of women, with 80 % of men unable to access meaningful sexual relationships ([16]). For incels, inceldom is in part a product of our modern times and the liberalisation of Western societies.

Incel ideology rejects personality and emotional connection as important factors in finding a sexual or romantic partner. Incels conclude that their "genetic inferiority" means that mainstream society is actively working to suppress or reject information regarding inceldom, in order to remove them from the gene pool or to avoid providing material support for incels.

Violent misogyny and anti-feminism

The dehumanisation of women is commonplace across the incel ecosystem. Women and girls are referred to as "holes", "toilets" and **"femoids"** as well as racialised terms, such as Asian women referred to as **"noodlewhores"**. Women are described as unable to feel empathy or love and are believed to be incapable of suffering from mental health issues ([17]). Incels believe that women can show affection towards physically attractive men (referred to as **Chads**), however, women's hypergamous behaviour means they will still always seek out a more attractive partner, if available.

The ideology does not include any elements of personal responsibility on the part of members of the community and instead supports the view that their involuntary celibacy is in large part a product of women's perceived biological and evolutionary behaviour. Suggestions that incels may struggle with relationships because of their misogyny, social behaviour or hostility towards women are rejected by the community.

([15]) Zimmerman et al., Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of 'Incels'.
([16]) Zimmerman et al., Recognizing the Violent Extremist Ideology of 'Incels', p. 7.
([17]) Chang, The monstrous-feminine in the incel imagination.

Incels, Violence and Social media

Celebration of violence towards women can be found throughout the incel ecosystem. This includes violence committed by incels as well as third-party violence.

The extent of violent discourse varies depending on whether it is a high-risk or low-risk incel community. Discussion of violence is common in high-risk incel communities, while low-risk incel communities contain low levels of violent discussion. It is helpful to think about violent incel discourse in three tiers: personal, interpersonal, and societal [18]. Incel-created websites and forums, such as incels.is, are the most high-risk platforms in the ecosystem where discussion of all three tiers of violence can be found. Communities on popular social media platforms, such as YouTube and Twitter, represent lower-risk platforms where discourse tends to focus on personal-level violence, however, discussion of interpersonal- and societal-level violence can also occur. Reddit was historically a high-risk incel platform, but a series of bans of incel subreddits in 2017 and 2018 has reduced the amount of incel content on Reddit. While incel subreddits remain on the platform, these are niche subreddits and have lower levels of engagement than the banned 2017/2018 subreddits.

Personal-level violence

Suicidal ideation discussions are extremely common across the incel ecosystem. Incels post about their interests in committing suicide, post suicide notes, engage in discussions about methods of suicide and record the deaths of prominent incels who have committed suicide [19]. Concerningly, suicidal individuals are often encouraged by their fellow incels online to commit murder-suicide as a way to inflict punishment on society for their inceldom. Suicidal individuals are often encouraged to *"go ER"*, which references the societal-level attack of incel "hero" Elliot Rodger. In the rare instances when an incel attempts to discourage or support a fellow incel expressing suicidal ideation, they are met with hostility from the wider incel community.

Interpersonal-level violence

Interpersonal violence discussed in the incel ecosystem falls into three categories [20]: violent criminal behaviour, actions taken with the intention of humiliating women, and actions that make women feel physically uncomfortable. Incel-perpetrated violence discussed in the incel ecosystem includes: violent and intimidating behaviour towards sex workers; the online and offline harassment of women; molesting women on public transport or following women home in order to intimidate them; and **catfishing** women on dating apps in order to humiliate them or access naked images.

Societal level-violence

Societal-level violence is discussed and often celebrated on high-risk incel platforms. Individuals who have committed mass violence either explicitly or implicitly as a result of their inability to cope with sexual rejection by women are lionised. While all incels may not support societal-level attacks, some members of the incel community are sympathetic to attacks committed by individuals exhibiting what they believe to be "incel traits". Societal-level violence is seen by some as an *understandable* response to inceldom, if not always explicitly justified.

The merits of different methods of violent attacks are debated, with incel killers discussed and ranked according to their "kill count" of women or targeting of men. Incel killers are referred to using the honorific "saint" [21] and in some cases described as martyrs. Mass murderers, such as Elliot Rodger, Alek Minassian and George Sodini, have become synonymous with societal-level attacks, with incels encouraging one

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[18] Ibid., p. 7.
[19] Daly & Laskovtsov, "Goodbye, My Friendcels": An Analysis of Incel Suicide Posts.
[20] Ibid., p. 7.
[21] Witt, 'If i cannot have it, i will do everything i can to destroy it.' The canonization of Elliot Rodger.

another to "go ER" ([22]), "go Minassian" or "go Sodini", which can be understood as an encouragement to commit a violent attack or harm oneself.

Incels believe that a larger proportion of men than those who explicitly identify as an incel are in fact involuntarily celibate. Therefore, individuals who have carried out attacks may be adopted into the canon of incel heroes if they specifically targeted women, or if the attacker described their experience of sexual or romantic rejection as a factor in their violence.

Incels and Violent Extremist Groups

There are members of the incel ecosystem who self-identify with or support violent extremist groups and ideologies.

Violent right-wing extremism

Incels who identify with or support violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) can be found within the incel ecosystem. These incels may refer to themselves as **stormcels**, **whitecels** or **alt-rightcels**. VRWE incels may use avatars or share memes using VRWE imagery, as well as sharing related content. However, this content is usually still linked to the incel community or ideology.

In some cases, the incel community has been subsumed under research into VRWE ([23]). This approach ignores the diversity of the incel community and fails to address the ideological differences between the two phenomena. The incel ideology views society through a gendered lens. While there is some ideological overlap with VRWE such as anti-feminism, anti-Semitism and social conservatism, these beliefs are secondary to incels' overarching interpretation of their grievances through a gendered lens. Incels engage in discussions about race and racial hierarchies, but they are not concerned with pursuing a white supremacist political agenda. The incel ecosystem is also diverse with incels self-identifying as people of colour ([24]) who do not subscribe to VRWE beliefs. VRWE incels' understanding of their inceldom may be informed by racism and their VRWE beliefs, but, within the incel ecosystem, discussions on this topic are often focused on their impact on their access to sexual relationships. VRWE incels are therefore incels whose beliefs include a racist component, rather than another form of VRWE.

Violent jihadism

A limited amount of content related to violent jihadism can be found within the incel ecosystem. This may be due to stricter moderation of jihadist content compared to VRWE content, both of incel platforms by site moderators and by mainstream online platforms. Incels discuss the concept of **jihadmaxxing,** which is the suggestion that Muslim incels join jihadist groups in order to access sexual relationships with subjugated women. Discussion of joining jihadist groups for this reason appears to remain hypothetical; incels do not discuss practical methods to travel or join jihadist groups. Violent jihadism is also discussed with particular focus on the treatment of women, with incels believing the treatment of women by violent extremist groups, such as ISIS, is a positive way to punish women.

([22]) The initials ER refer to Elliot Rodger, the Isla Vista shooter and incel hero.
([23]) Ong, Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right.
([24]) Anti-Defamation League, Online Poll Results Provide New Insights into Incel Community.

Glossary of Incel Terms

Term	Meaning
80/20 Rule	A reinterpretation of the Pareto principle by the incel community in the context of dating. It posits that 80 % of women have access to the top 20 % of men in a society, meaning that the "bottom" 80 % of men are left with the remaining 20 % of women between them.
Alpha	A man at the top of the social status hierarchy. For incels this means a physically attractive, often tall, man.
Alt-rightcel	An incel who identifies with the alt-right.
Ascend	To "ascend" is to leave inceldom and access sex with a woman. This sex must not be paid for; incels who visit sex workers have not "ascended".
Betabux	Any man who is in a relationship with a woman but is not a Chad. Women only settle for betabux either after they have hit "the Wall", and can no longer access sex with Chads, or if they are secretly continuing to have sex with Chads while with a betabux. Women are believed by incels to seek out betabux men for financial support.
Blackpill	The blackpill philosophy argues that an individual's dating success is determined wholly by their physical attractiveness, and is thus determined at birth. Therefore, men who are genetically inferior cannot access sexual and romantic relationships.
Bluepill	According to incels, an individual who has "swallowed" the bluepill remains in a state of blissful ignorance, and has not yet woken up to the fact that society discriminates against males, rather than females.
Chad	The archetypal Alpha male believed to be favoured by society owing to stereotypically "Aryan" good looks, genes, bone structure, hair and height.
Catfishing	Creating a fake social media profile for the purposes of abusing or defrauding an individual online.
Chadfishing	A form of catfishing where incels create dating profiles using images of conventionally attractive men. It is usually used to help prove that women are more likely to interact with someone online if they are physically attracted to them.
Femoid/Foid	A shortened version of "femanoid" – which is a combination of female and humanoid. A dehumanising term suggesting women are not human.
Going ER	Named after Elliot Rodger, this term is used by incels to describe or laud the act of committing mass murder, or murder-suicide.
Hikikomori	A Japanese term to describe extremely socially isolated individuals, usually men, who have withdrawn from any social contact and society.

Hypergamy	The belief that women are evolutionarily predetermined to "marry up" by seeking out the most attractive Alpha male. Hypergamy is premised on the belief that women are more sexually selective, and will leave less suitable men for men who are more physically attractive and have a better socioeconomic standing.
Jihadpill	Accepting that the only way of accessing sexual and romantic relationships is by becoming a jihadist or committing jihad.
Jihadmaxxing	Accessing sexual and romantic relationships by becoming a jihadist.
KHHV	Kissless, hugless, handholdless virgin.
LDAR	Lay Down And Rot is a phrase claiming that self-development, positive behaviour or corrective actions (such as **looksmaxxing**) are pointless, and that an individual's situation cannot be improved. To LDAR is to give up on activities other than those that are consistent with a "rotting" lifestyle. Acceptable rotting behaviour includes browsing incel forums, watching pornography, withdrawing from human contact and remaining in bed.
Looksmaxxing	Any attempt made to improve one's looks to reach their greatest aesthetic potential. This includes a number of methods of self-improvement, such as going to the gym, getting a haircut, improving one's style or taking steroids.
Manosphere	Term for the loose collection of online anti-feminist, misogynistic, pro-men communities. Four distinct areas of the manosphere are the **MRA**, **MGTOW**, **PUA** and **incel** communities.
MGTOW	A subsection of the manosphere that advocates that men withdraw from romantic relationships with women, including **(MGTOW)** refraining from having children other than through surrogacy, and enforcing a strict gender hierarchy.
MRAs	A subsection of the manosphere focused on political and legal change advancing men's interests, such as reducing divorce settlements and child support payments, as solutions to their perceived oppression.
NEET	Stands for Not in Education, Employment or Training. Living a NEET lifestyle is respected by incels because it represents the act of removing oneself from an oppressive society.
Normie	An individual who is not part of the incel community.
PUAs	A subsection of the manosphere that follows the redpill ideology. The PUAs' goal is to maximise the number of women they have sex with through learning "game", or techniques that manipulate women into having sex.
Stormcel	An incel who identifies with violent right-wing extremism. The prefix "storm-" refers to the violent far-right website Stormfront.
Redpill	Refers to an individual waking up to the real world. Those who subscribe to the redpill ideology argue that women are markedly better off than men.

Sexual Marketplace	The sexual marketplace is the modern-day dating world.
The Wall	The Wall, or the agepill, is the maximum age that a woman reaches before her sexual market value starts to decrease. According to incels, this age is 25.
Whitecel	An incel who identifies by their white ethnicity and violent far-right ideologies.

Part 2: Incels in Europe

Where do Incels Congregate Online?

Incel communities exist across social media platforms and in incel-created websites. The most high-risk incel content can be found on websites created and moderated by incels themselves. The most prominent incel-created sites are incels.is, incels.net, incels.wiki and incel.blog. Incels are also present on popular social media platforms, with the most active communities on YouTube, Twitter and Reddit. Incel content features on various image message boards such as 4chan and 8kun, but the anonymous nature of these boards and the high amount of violent misogynistic content makes it difficult to identify exclusively incel communities.

Incel Communities in Europe

The incel online ecosystem is transnational with a number of English-speaking and other language communities. Published research has mainly focused on anglophone incel communities, which contain high levels of violent rhetoric [25]. Anglophone incel communities include members from European countries who share anecdotes of their local experiences with inceldom.
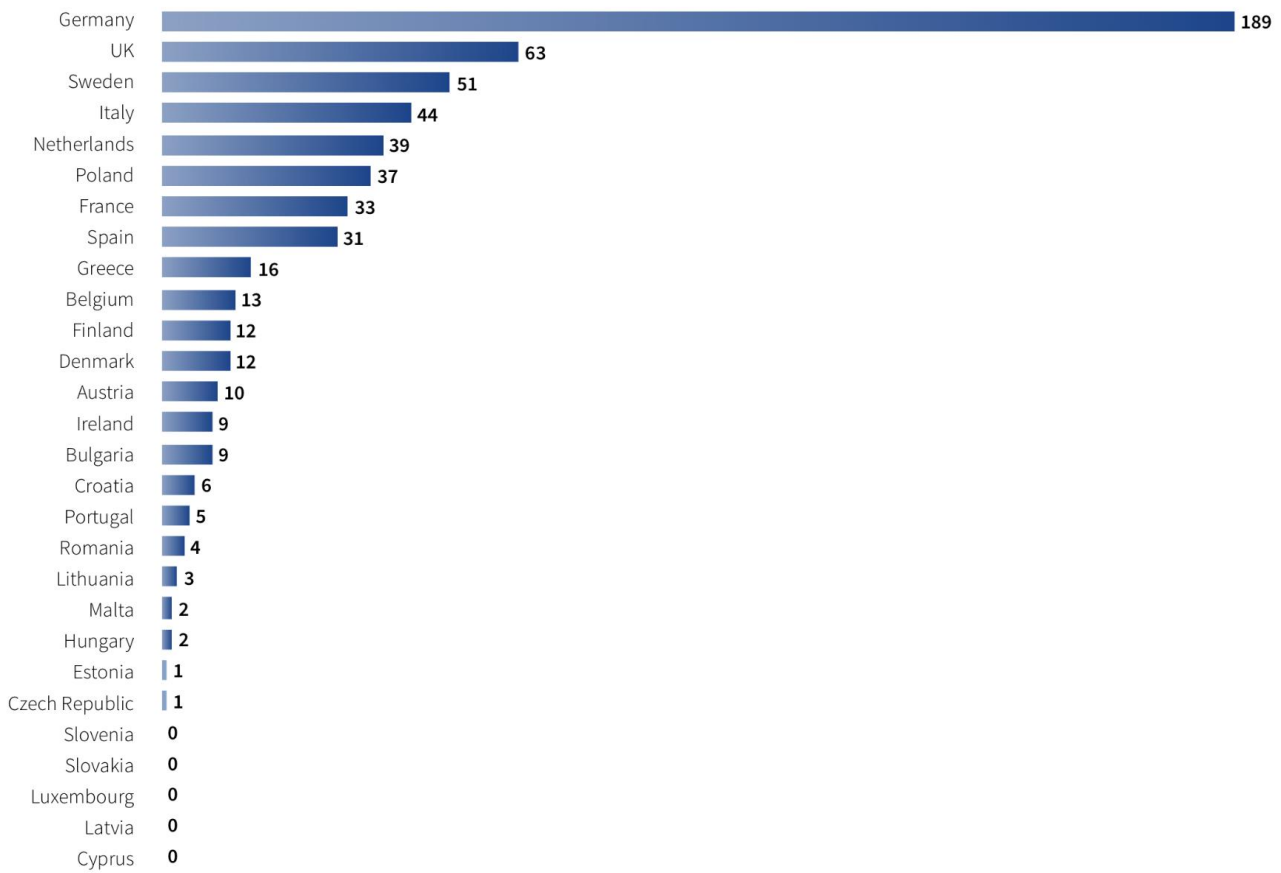
Members of the incel community understand their inceldom as context dependent, with incels considering certain countries to be more difficult to exist in than others. Factors that incels believe contribute to this difficulty include political and social values, in particular those pertaining to feminism, freedom of abortion and beliefs about premarital sex. Europe is considered a particularly difficult place to be an incel because of its perceived feminist and progressive policies and values. European incels of colour also express difficulty accessing sexual relationships as a result of racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia.

There is a paucity of research on European incels; however, Moonshot analysed self-reported geographic data from the largest anglophone incel forum in an effort to help estimate the breakdown of European users [26].

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[25] Jaki et al., Online hatred of women in the Incels.me forum; Tranchese & Sugiura, "I Don't Hate All Women, Just Those Stuck-Up Bitches".
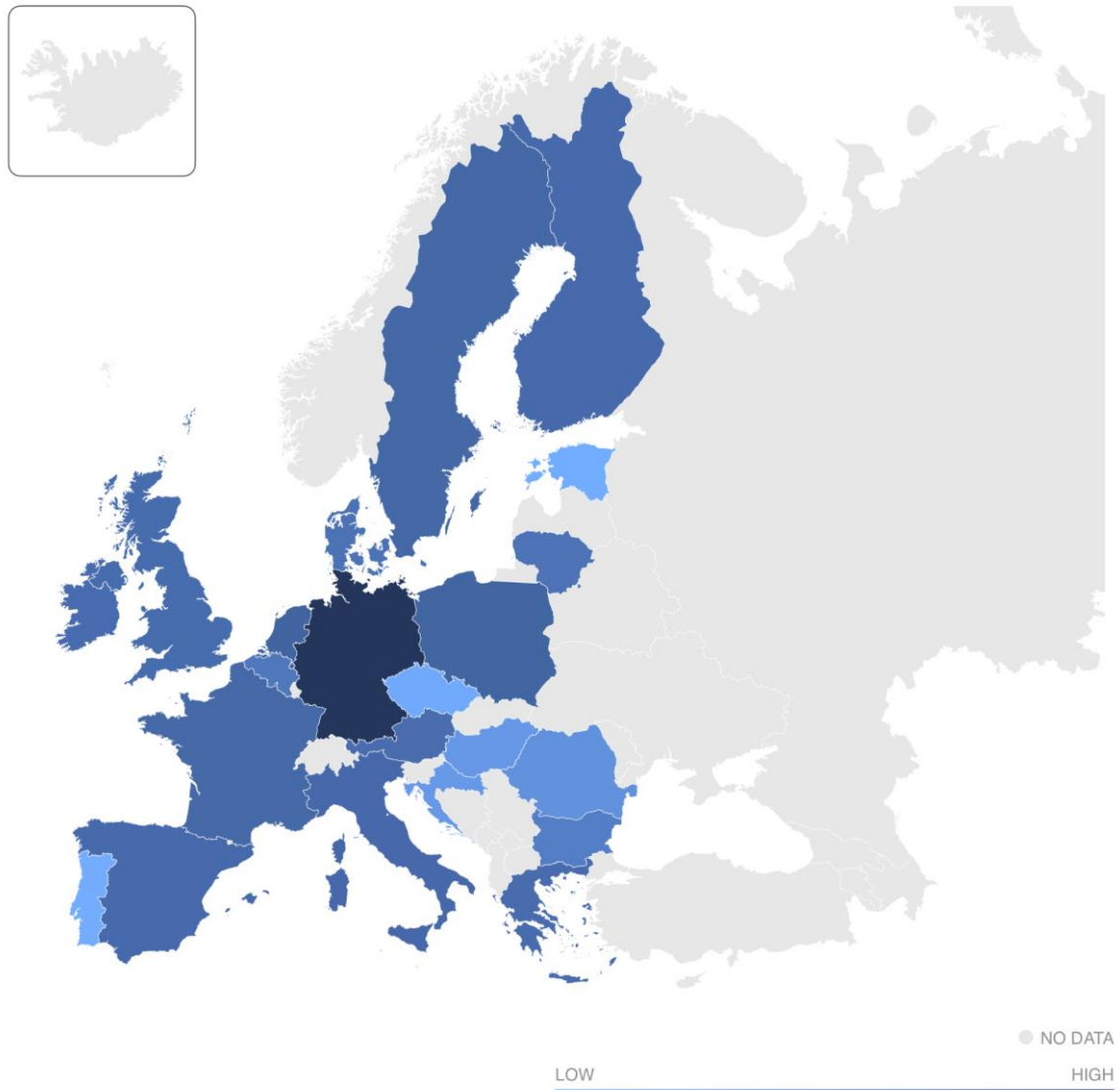[26] Data was collected by Moonshot from incels.is (formerly incels.co), the largest anglophone incel online community, from October 2017 to October 2020. Demographic information was not available for users. Instead, keyword selectors such as "i live in" or "i am from" were used and paired with European countries to identify comments from the incels.co data set that mentioned both a location indicator phrase and a European country name.

Figure 1 : Number of incel.is users sorted by country, © Moonshot ([27])

Country	Users
Germany	189
UK	63
Sweden	51
Italy	44
Netherlands	39
Poland	37
France	33
Spain	31
Greece	16
Belgium	13
Finland	12
Denmark	12
Austria	10
Ireland	9
Bulgaria	9
Croatia	6
Portugal	5
Romania	4
Lithuania	3
Malta	2
Hungary	2
Estonia	1
Czech Republic	1
Slovenia	0
Slovakia	0
Luxembourg	0
Latvia	0
Cyprus	0

([27]) Data was collected by Moonshot from incels.is (formerly incel.co), the largest anglophone incel online community, from October 2017 to October 2020. Demographic information was not available for users. Instead, keyword selectors such as "i live in" or "i am from" were used and paired with European countries to identify comments from the incels.co data set that mentioned both a location indicator phrase and a European country name.

Figure 2: Incel.is users sorted by country in Europe, © Moonshot ([28])

● NO DATA

LOW   HIGH

([28]) After analysing user comments for a location indicator phrase and European country, the post histories of those users were analysed. The four countries with the highest volume of posts were Germany, France, Sweden and Italy. The comments of these users were then qualitatively analysed for key themes by country.

Incel discussion themes by nationality ([29])

Incels in Germany	Incels in France	Incels in Sweden	Incels in Italy
Incels of colour feel that they are being compared to the tall, white "Aryan Chad".	Incels feel that France is a hyper-feminist country that has eroded men's rights.	White incels in Sweden feel that they are less desirable than men of colour.	Incels feel that Italy is becoming too populated by refugees, impacting the "dating pool for ethnics".
Users lament that "German girls hate ethnics".	Users cite the illegality of paternity tests in France as evidence of the country's feminist agenda.	Users encourage incels of colour to visit Scandinavia for sex tourism purposes.	Incels believe that the Italian culture of "treating women like princesses" reinforces hypergamy.

Part 3: P/CVE – Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges to interventions with the Incel Community

Ideological challenges	
Blackpill	Incels support their blackpilled world view with **blackpill "science",** which is a collection of academic and scientific research, pseudoscientific research and experiments conducted by incels themselves, which they feel supports their worldview.
	For incels, the blackpill is a universal and objective truth. Therefore, any support or intervention that deviates or disagrees with the primary importance of physical attractiveness is viewed as upholding mainstream beliefs and rejecting the objective truth of the blackpill. This creates challenges for practitioners. Support intended to help incels with social interactions, mental health or improving feelings of self-worth through hobbies and self-improvement activities is very likely to be viewed by the community as ineffective because they have no effect on physical attractiveness.
Gynocentrism	Incels, in particular those in the West, believe we exist in gynocentric societies. Gynocentrism is the belief that society is structured to benefit women and oppress men. For incels, a gynocentric society attempts to oppress men who are not deemed "valuable" by women. Incels believe women's hypergamous behaviour determines value – making physically unattractive men the least valuable members of society.
	Similar to the consequences of a belief in the blackpill, incels' belief in gynocentrism means they view any support or advice offered by mainstream society to be in service of upholding a gynocentric power structure.
	A major challenge for practitioners is demonstrating that their proposed support is in the best interests of the at-risk individual and not an attempt to

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([29]) After identifying users' geographic location using location indicator phrases, we identified the top four countries with the highest number of incels. We then qualitatively analysed their comment histories to identify key themes for each country.

	indoctrinate incels back into a system that incels believe is structured against them.
Sympathetic to suicide as a solution	The unfortunate result of incels' blackpilled and gynocentric world view is a belief that their involuntary celibacy is inevitable and unchangeable. The resulting feeling of hopelessness and despair has created an environment sympathetic to suicide and suicidal ideation.
	Suicide is viewed as an understandable response to the position incels find themselves in. Suicidal individuals who share their thoughts within the incel ecosystem are met with understanding and solidarity from the community, and in some cases other incels expressing their own interest in taking their lives. In the rare instance that an incel tries to discourage suicide or suggest mental health support, they are met with hostility from the incel community who see an anti-suicide stance as dismissive of the hopeless situation of incels.
Extreme resistance and hostility towards mental health professionals	The incel ideology is extremely resistant and hostile to mental health support. Mental health professionals are viewed as upholding the status quo and rejecting what incels believe to be the objective truth of the blackpill. Mental health professionals are believed to be dismissive of incels' concerns, and this is supported by the sharing of personal anecdotes of mental health professionals who have not validated incels' world views.

Identification and access challenges to intervention

Socially isolated offline and online	Incels are socially isolated individuals. Many incels describe themselves as **NEET** (not in education, employment or training) and so lack many of the protective factors that can support disengagement. Some incels also share difficulties with their home and family lives, or struggles with making friends. For incels who have a support system, many feel they cannot share their incel experiences with peers because of the social stigma attached to the label. Incels are also reluctant to meet one another offline, many expressing that they prefer to communicate in incel-created spaces online.
	This poses a challenge for practitioners not only because of a lack of protective factors to aid in disengagement, but also a difficulty in reaching incels to provide interventions. To be successful, any intervention approach with the incel community must have an online aspect in order to reach them where they are present and identifiable.
	Reaching incels in the online space also poses a challenge to intervention providers. The most high-risk content is found on incel-created websites and these spaces are likely to be used by the most vulnerable individuals. These sites are carefully moderated by incels, making it difficult for non-incels to provide interventions in this space. Incel communities on social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube may be more accessible for practitioners.
Digital natives aware of being monitored	Incels tend to be conscious of data privacy and potential for online surveillance, and so take measures to protect their privacy online. Posts on incel-created websites will often comment about their potential surveillance or

	encourage users to use virtual private networks for personal security. The transnational nature of this community, as well as the steps they take to protect their identity, makes it difficult to identify incels geographically. This poses a challenge for intervention providers who aim to provide support to at-risk individuals based on geographical location. Voluntary engagement with an interventions service is particularly important for the incel community because of their fear of being targeted and their high levels of resistance to external support.
Shitposting	"Shitposting", or the use of humour to conceal extremist or violent language, has been a tactic employed by far-right extremists to rebrand their extremist positions under an *"ironic guise"* ([30]). A similar tactic can be seen within the incel ecosystem. It may be challenging for intervention providers and practitioners to discern the authenticity of statements made by members of the incel community. However, regardless of intention, the extremist content is still publicly available and may influence other at-risk members of the incel ecosystem. Therefore, it is important that intervention providers and researchers take any extremist or violent content seriously, and do not dismiss statements as shitposting.
Risks to intervention providers	Intervention providers need to be cognisant of digital security as there is a risk of doxxing or online harassment when working with violent misogynistic communities. The violent and extremist content found in incel communities also poses a risk for intervention providers through exposure to harmful content. There is a particular risk to female intervention providers, specifically during the early stages of an intervention or with high-risk individuals, due to the misogynistic nature of this community. Providers should take steps to protect the privacy and security of their staff.

Recommendations

This section sets forth recommendations for countering the risk of incel-motivated violence. These recommendations are based on research, interviews, and workshops with interventions practitioners and researchers.

Raise awareness amongst practitioners of incels, incel ideology, the threat of male supremacist beliefs and violent misogynistic ideologies

An important first step in tackling the incel phenomenon is to raise awareness of the incel ideology amongst frontline service workers and practitioners. This effort should include information about the incel ideology, its potential relationship to violence, potential "push factors" and potential intervention approaches. It is important to note that this recommendation is not premised on the notion that factors such as mental health issues, social isolation and neurodiversity are in any way predictors of incel behaviour; the intent is rather to encourage broad awareness raising such that practitioners are equipped to act if and when they receive an incel referral. Practitioners working in the following fields should be aware of the incel ideology:

([30]) Radicalisation Awareness Network, It's not funny anymore. Far-right extremists' use of humour.

- Mental health (due to the high levels of suicidal ideation discussed within online incel communities)
- Autism spectrum disorder support services (due to the self-identification of some incel individuals with autism spectrum disorder)
- P/CVE interventions, particularly VRWE
- Teen dating/intimate relationship education
- Gender-based violence programming, particularly perpetrator-focused programming
- Digital literacy
- Support services for racialised, disabled or otherwise disenfranchised youth
- Frontline health work
- Gaming and internet addiction
- Social isolation

Design programmes to reach incels in their preferred online environment

Incels tend to be very socially isolated, and in online communities across multiple platforms. For interventions to be effective, they need to reach incels online. There is offline programming, such as the ManKind Project, that addresses vulnerabilities such as mental health vulnerabilities and social isolation [31]. However, without an online presence to their programming, these programmes are unlikely to reach incels. Intervention and prevention providers should consider outreach designed to engage with incels online.

Where possible, providers of offline counselling and support services should consider adapting their services to the online space. The pandemic, and subsequent national lockdowns, has forced many organisations to offer services online. This provides a real opportunity for P/CVE work with the incel population, who may be more receptive to services online, given their familiarity with these spaces and platforms. Interventions can also be delivered via online messaging apps or text, not only the more traditional phone and video mechanisms. For example, Crisis Text Line, a United States-based organisation, delivers text-based support services where clients can engage in text conversations with intervention providers offering mental health support [32]. A similar service could be a potential avenue for interventions with incels.

Develop alternative, positive spaces for men and boys to share grievances

In many ways, the incel community operates as an *emotional online support group*. The incel community and other violent misogynistic communities provide a toxic outlet for these individuals to express their concerns and have their feelings validated.

There is a lack of alternative *online* spaces for men and boys to engage in discussions about sexual relationships, dating, rejection and shame. An example of an approach that could be adapted for the incel ideology is the work conducted by Christian Mogensen of the Center for Digital Youth Care in Denmark [33]. Mogensen is an intervention provider who plays games online with young men in an environment where they can build a relationship through gaming and discuss their grievances and world views. Similar initiatives exist on the gaming chat platform Discord, enabling discussions around mental health and positive masculinity. For example, Next Gen Men, a Canada-based organisation working on positive masculinity, created a Discord server for boys aged 12-15 to share and support each other in a healthy

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[31] ManKind Project: https://mankindproject.org/
[32] Crisis Text Line: https://www.crisistextline.org/about-us/
[33] Interview with Christian Mogensen, Center for Digital Youth Care in Denmark.

and monitored environment, with effective safeguards in place (³⁴). These alternative online spaces offer a way for at-risk individuals to experience the social identity, emotional support and sense of cohesion that comes from collective gatherings online, without the harmful ideologies espoused by the incel community.

Digital literacy

Digital literacy may help at-risk individuals to critically think about the messaging and narratives used by the incel ideology and to identify the way the community plays on grievances and manipulates research in order to attract new members. Inoculation has proven effective in tackling violent extremism, and so may be effective for the incel population. Further testing of this approach and its effectiveness for the incel population should be conducted to inform future initiatives. More information on attitudinal inoculation and its potential effectiveness in promoting resistance to persuasion can be found in Braddock (2019) (³⁵).

(³⁴) Next Gen Men Boys Club: https://www.nextgenmen.ca/club
(³⁵) Braddock, Vaccinating Against Hate.

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