
Predictors of Radical Intentions among Incels: A Survey of 54 Self-identified Incels

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Abstract. Incels (*in*voluntarily *ce*libates) are an online-based identity group of mostly males who feel disenfranchised because of what they see as an unfair advantage the society gives to muscular, confident males, taking away Incels' chances of securing a sexual relationship. Several Incels have left behind ideological manifestos before carrying out acts of mass murder, alerting the public and security services to the danger Incels can present. Nonetheless, data about radicalization (defined as support for illegal or violent political action) of the larger Incel population remain scarce. This study aimed to expand this knowledge by conducting a survey of 54 self-identified Incels. Results demonstrated high rates of self-reported depression (91%), anxiety (85%), PTSD (40%), autism spectrum disorders (53%), and a history of bullying (91%). A new measure of radicalization specific to the Incel community (Incel Radicalization Scale) demonstrated high internal consistency and construct validity, making it a useful tool for identification and early prevention of radicalization among Incels. Radicalization was not correlated with Incel ideological commitment. A small proportion of respondents (17%) scored above the midpoint on Incel Radicalization Scale, demonstrating high radicalization. Discussion focuses on implications for preventing and countering violent extremism efforts, including prioritizing mental health and trauma-informed care.

1 Introduction

Incels, or “involuntary celibates,” are an online subculture of primarily men who believe they are prevented by the society from fulfilling their desire to have sex, date, or establish relationships with women (Lindsay 2020). Incels tend to blame their disenfranchisement on *lookism*, or women's choice of sexual partners based solely on physical features (Halpin 2021)¹. Another culprit often mentioned on Incel online forums is biological determinism that “results in a sexual hierarchy that dominates Western civilization” (Beauchamp 2018) and predestines certain men to never find a mate (Kelly, DiBranco,

1. There is a sizable body of research on lookism, with some evidence that it does factor into day-to-day interactions rather than being a figment of Incels' imagination (Minerva 2013).

and DeCook 2021), thus condemning Incels to a life of loneliness (Jaki et al. 2019). Incels who gained notoriety because of their violent acts—Elliot Rodger, Chris Harper-Mercer, and Alek Minassian (notorious Incel killers)—have shared these ideas. Their examples continue to inspire Incel violence (News 2021). Most recently, on August 12, 2021, 22-year-old Jake Davison killed five people, including his own mother, and injured another two in Plymouth, England, before killing himself (News 2021). Although not a self-identified Incel (Kates 2021), Davison, too, blamed *lookism* for being unable to fulfill his “right” to a “16 17-year-old GF [girlfriend]” (Ross 2021).

These mass killings, coupled with the disturbing sentiments expressed in the killers’ manifestos, introduced Incels to the broader public as an emerging threat. At the same time, the counterterrorism community began to view Incels as a form of ideologically motivated violent extremism and an emerging domestic terrorism threat (Canadian Security Intelligence Service 2020; Hall 2021; Hoffman and Ware 2020). In this context, it is important to note that the total number of mass murders committed by men self-identified as Incels or who have mentioned Incel-related names or writings in their private correspondence or in social media posts since 2014 is eight, although the number of their victims is, tragically, greater: 61 (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020).

Recent studies have pointed out the high prevalence of mental health issues within the Incel community (Costello 2022) and highlighted mental health issues as a factor in Incel radicalization (Moskalenko et al. 2022). Consistent with these findings, Elliot Rodger reportedly struggled with suicidal ideations (Brugger 2015); Harper-Mercer and Minassian had been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome (Anderson 2017; JCS 2021); and Davison claimed to have autism (Weaver and Morris 2021). Indeed, mental health is one of the most prevalent discussion topics on Incel forums (Stijelja 2021), yet, to date, there is little empirical research connecting Incel mental health and radicalization.

To address this knowledge gap, this paper seeks to explore the relationship between radicalization, mental health, and Inceldom by directly asking Incels about their experiences and attitudes. These kinds of primary data are scarce in the Incel research literature, yet they are of highest priority for both understanding the Incel experience and gauging the threat Incels might present. In expanding the primary data foundation of Incel research, we hope to address two specific research questions and one general question. Specifically, first, we want to assess the prevalence of mental health problems among Incels. Second, we want to measure the relationship between Incel ideology (beliefs about Incels as a group and their role in the world) and radicalization (support for violent and/or illegal action; (Moskalenko and McCauley 2020). More generally, given the publicity received by the notorious Incel killers, we want to explore a potential mismatch between the mass public’s widespread beliefs about Incels and Incels’ own views of themselves as a group.

To tackle these questions, we will begin by introducing the history of the Incel movement, focusing specifically on the Incel ideology known as the Black Pill. We will then report results of a survey study conducted with 54 self-identified Incels. These results of the survey, which focused on mental health, Incel ideology, and radical intentions, will inform the discussion about implications for the broader understanding of the Incel threat and for potentially fruitful intervention directions. The Methods and Results sections detail the findings from an internet survey that was completed by 54 self-identified Incels. Participants reported high levels of depression (91%), anxiety (85%), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (40%), and autism spectrum disorders (53%). Almost all participants reported a history of being bullied (91%). About half (51%) also reported having been persecuted for their Inceldom. Most Incels rejected violent and illegal intentions as a course of action and did not admire notorious Incels (Minassian, Rodger, Harper-Mercer) for their violent actions. A commitment to Incel ideology predicted activist intentions

(legal and non-violent political actions), but ideological commitment did not predict radical attitudes or radical intentions among Incels.

2 History of the Incel movement

The “Incel movement” dates to the late 1990s when a website called “Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project” became an online community of socially awkward youth. Originally, the platform was a place that invited men who had trouble interacting with women to consult the community’s female members for advice (Beauchamp 2018). In its original incarnation, Incel could be someone of either gender “who was lonely, had never had sex, or who hadn’t had a relationship in a long time” (Taylor 2018). Incels didn’t initially emphasize their victimhood.

The shift happened in the aftermath of Gamergate in 2014. The primary feature of Gamergate was the seemingly organized harassment campaign of female video game designers during which they were threatened with rape or death. Incels as a movement or designation of a constructed identity emerged in part from this kind of online toxic masculinity (Owen 2019). Incels created their own pseudoscientific ideology replete with a unique lexicon, some of which they had appropriated from the Wachowski siblings’ 1999 blockbuster movie *The Matrix*². The red, blue, and black pills of Incel ideology echo the scene in *The Matrix* in which taking a blue pill allowed one to continue living a life of delusion, whereas taking a red pill allowed one to experience life’s ugly truths. For Incels, “awakening” included insights into how women had victimized them through “feminism’s misandry and brainwashing” (Ging 2019, 640).

Incels’ beliefs include the idea that there is a social hierarchy in which “Chads” and “Stacys” (attractive men and women) are at the apex. “Normies” represent average-looking people, and are the majority. And at the bottom of the hierarchy are unattractive Incels. At the core of Incel ideology of the Black Pill is the idea that Incels cannot form sexual relationships with women because of inborn deficiencies (i.e., physical appearance, height, weight, and cognitive abilities) and their lack of social skills or status.³ Many Incels subscribe to the existence of “hypergamy,” which claims that women are too sexually selective and choose only the most socioeconomically and physically attractive mates, essentially “marrying up” (Moonshot 2020). (There is evidence that Incels are to some degree accurate in their assessment of the socioeconomic conditions contributing to their predicament (Brooks, Russo-Batterham, and Blake 2022)).

Some Incels consider these grievances a justification for violence against society, and especially against feminist women. In 2014, twenty-two-year-old Elliot Rodger executed a multipronged mass casualty attack at Isla Vista, California, comprised of stabbings, drive-by shooting, and vehicle ramming, which resulted in six killed and 14 injured. In his 130+ page manifesto, Rodger justified the attack because he was a “kissless virgin” (Rodger 2014, 67).

Rodger uploaded several explicit YouTube videos in which he rationalized his worldview. These videos and his manifesto offered insight about his hatred for women, people of

2. There are several pills, including a “rape pill,” which Brzuszkiewicz (2020) describes as believing that all sex is coerced because women do not have the ability to make rational decisions. Additionally, there is a “purple pill” described as being the “moderate pill.” The “Pill” jargon is not unique to Incels, as the metaphor is used by various Men’s Rights Activists (MRA) organizations, QAnon conspiracy theorists (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021) and within far-right communities. In May of 2020, Elon Musk tweeted, “Take the Red Pill” to his 34 million plus followers—to which Ivanka Trump responded “Taken” within an hour (Swearingen 2020).

3. Some Incels recognize that women will select non-Chad men if they are exceptionally high status or wealthy; they point to Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates as examples of comparable men overcoming physical deficiencies.

color, and anyone who was sexually active (as he was not) to justify his killing spree (Rodger 2014). This corpus of material catapulted him to a kind of “sainthood” status within the Incel community (Bloom 2022), and inspired others to follow suit. Thus, in 2018, Alek Minassian rented a Ryder van and plowed through pedestrians on Yonge Street in Toronto, killing 10 and injuring 16. Before doing so, Minassian posted his own “call to duty” on his social media:

Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger! (Feldman 2018)

Minassian did not leave a manifesto, but he shared Rodger’s antipathy to women:

One of Minassian’s stated motivations for the attack is retribution against society for years of rejection by women. He has told psychiatrists as well as the police that he became entangled with the so-called “Incel movement” online where men discuss their hatred of women. (CBC 2020)

In the extreme, Incels believe that they are *entitled* to women and sex. This can lead to resentment and the dehumanization of women.

3 Incel ideology and radicalization

Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook (2021) argue that while not all attacks committed by Incels are terrorism, some, like Rodger’s and Minassian’s, may qualify for the designation because they are perpetrated with ideological motivations, using violence to elicit fear and terror, with the goal of convincing people in power to address their grievances and to inspire copycat attacks (Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021).

In February 2020, an unidentified (minor) seventeen-year-old male entered a massage parlor in Toronto, Canada, and fatally stabbed 24-year-old Ashley Noell Arzaga and injured two other massage therapists. After evidence pointed to the fact that the perpetrator espoused Incel ideology, the initial charges against him of first-degree murder were amended to include terrorism. Authorities referred to the underage perpetrator as an “Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremist” (IMVE), and this case became the first indictment where an Incel attack was treated as terrorism (Cecco 2020). It was also the first time Canadian authorities applied counterterrorism laws to an extremist who wasn’t an Islamist terrorist (Bell, Russell, and McDonald 2020).

This has led to the meme of Incel “martyrs” or “saints” depicted graphically using Rodger’s image (and other well-known violent Incels) with halos on their social media posts. Some Incels even celebrate May 23 as “Saint Elliot’s Day,” calling it his “Day of Retribution.” Following Minassian’s vehicle-ramming attack in Toronto, Incel forums elevated him to sainthood as well. One comment on an Incel forum stated, “I hope this guy wrote a manifesto because he could be our next new saint” (Collins and Zadrozny 2018).

Terrorism research that explores the Incel phenomenon, including Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro (2020), Baele, Brace, and Coan (2019), and Cottee (2020), has highlighted the central role played by the “Manosphere,” the digital manifestation of the contemporary Men’s Rights Movement (MRM), including Men’s Rights Activists (MRA), Men Going their Own Way (MGTOW), and Incels (Jones, Trott, and Wright 2020). As Cottee explains, the Incel worldview is “rooted in a kind of lore – a stock of inherited clichés, wisdoms, and cautionary tales – about the natural order of things” (Cottee 2020). Outsiders or

newcomers to Incel social media may be confused by “shitposting,” defined as deliberate posting of provocative content on social media in order to upset or distract (Cambridge Dictionary 2022), and trolling behaviors (Moonshot 2020). It is precisely this type of trolling that creates “feedback loops” or echo chambers, where posts intentionally invite a sequence of responses that mask the seriousness of the original post while growing ever more radical and violent with each cycle (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020).

The debate about what is and is not terrorism continues, and it is especially pertinent when looking at Incel-motivated violence. The highly publicized cases of Incels’ mass casualty attacks, including Rodger, Minassian, and Harper-Mercer, suggest that Incels as a group might pose a threat to the wider community. However, a former senior strategic analyst in the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Phil Gurski, objected to a terrorism designation for Incels for lack of evidence that Incel attackers were motivated by ideology. He believes attacks such as the Sudbury massage parlor stabbing are hate crimes, not terrorism (Gurski 2020). Cottee (2020) echoes this opinion, concluding that Incels should not be considered a terrorist threat because they do not advocate for violence as a necessary means to in-group defense. Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro (2020) Hoffman et al. acknowledge that the number of victims of Incels’ attacks is statistically low (569).

The prevalence of trolling and “shitposting” on Incel social media makes extrapolating from Incel online rhetoric to their actual opinions and attitudes problematic, and primary data on Incels (surveys or interviews) remain scarce. Therefore, in this study we aimed to move beyond online rhetoric analyses—to empirically investigate Incels’ self-reported violent intentions, adding an important primary datum for the researchers and practitioners working on Incel-related issues.

4 Mental Illness, Trauma, and Incel Violence

There appears to be a mental-health component to the Incel phenomenon. Elliot Rodger discussed his mental health in his manifesto, and the police reports detailed a history of suicidal ideation, as well as a history of psychiatric drug use, including Xanax and Prozac, from the age of fifteen (Brugger 2015). Alek Minassian was placed in special needs classes in school, and in 2020 his attorney argued that he was on the autism spectrum (Mandell 2020).

The Incel forums frequently discuss mental health, depression, suicide, and other forms of self-harm, highlighted by the designated sub-categories for these discussions in the Incel parlance (i.e., mentalcel, autiscel, spergcel etc.). Researchers analyzing these forums conclude that the Incel community is rife with depression, low self-esteem, and a resistance to seeking psychological treatment (Romano 2018). Supporting these observations, Borrell (2020) cites a poll on Incels.co, where roughly 25% of users claim to have autism, and two-thirds of the respondents reported having considered committing suicide. Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro (2020) found that nearly 70% of Incels.co forum users were depressed and over 25% were on the autism spectrum. Moskalenko et al. (2022) report staggering rates of self-reported depression (95%) and anxiety (93%) in a survey of 274 Incels.

Perhaps related to the issues of mental health and radicalization is a history of trauma. Jasko, LaFree, and Kruglanski (2017) found that over 48% of 1,500 ideological extremists experienced trauma, and over 35% had experienced child abuse (Jasko et al. 2017). High rates of mental health issues and a history of trauma tend to correlate in general (Cloitre et al. 2019). Consistent with this, Moskalenko et al. (2022) found high rates of self-reported experiences of having been bullied and persecuted among Incels.

Additionally, there seems to be a linkage among childhood trauma, psychological development, and criminal behavior (Widom 2017). Cicchetti, Rogosch, and Thibodeau (2012) and Jaffee et al. (2004) reported a correlation between mistreatment and physical abuse and the development of antisocial behaviors in children. Other scholars have found a relationship between severe child abuse and higher levels of aggression and violent crime (Wert et al. 2017). Koehler (2020) considered the idea of toxic stress, including a variety of childhood traumatic events, as a potential explanation for the radicalization of some individuals, whose childhood trauma makes them vulnerable to the appeal of extremist groups.

This is not to rationalize or excuse Incel violence. As Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook (2021) note, mental health services are not meant to address male supremacist ideologies that are not mental health issues, nor does inability to form relationships with women constitute psychological trauma.

Building on and expanding previous research on Incels and political violence, the present study had several research goals. First, we aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge about Incels by conducting a survey among self-identified Incels, adding to the field much-needed primary source data about a reclusive population. Second, we wanted to address the question of mental health and past trauma among Incels. And third, we aimed to tackle the issues of Incel radicalization and ideology, two topics of particular interest to security professionals and terrorism researchers.

5 Methods

This study is the result of collaboration between the *Incel* podcast and Parallel Networks, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization (501c3) dedicated to combating polarization, hate and extremism. *Incel* is a podcast created by Naama Kates for CrawlSpace Media. It has been releasing weekly episodes since August 2019 that feature long-form interviews with Incels, along with experts on relevant issues such as terrorism, mental health, and feminism, and commentary on current events or media pieces related to Incels. The episodes run between 45 and 90 minutes and cover the guest's life story, or "journey with Inceldom," but are usually focused on a particular theme (e.g., autism, addiction, childhood abuse, racism, romantic obsession, or a specific Incel meme or belief such as hypergamy). Nearly all of the non-"expert" guests (Incels) contact the podcast themselves, offering to share their stories. Many explain that doing so is personally important, and express gratitude to the show for featuring honest, nonjudgmental conversations with people like themselves. Incels who contacted the Incel Podcast and expressed interest in speaking with an interventionist were directed to Parallel Networks' programming initiative, Light Upon Light, as well as invited to participate in an online survey. All participants were fluent English speakers, as determined by their interactions with the *Incel* podcast producer. It was emphasized that participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Participants filled out the survey before receiving any formal intervention services. To better design and structure intervention services for the Incel community, researchers at Light Upon Light designed a survey that included quantitative and short-form, open-ended qualitative questions focusing on mental health, history of psychological trauma, attitudes toward Incel culture, and radical ideas/intentions. The survey was posted online in Google Forms and ran from June 2021 to October 2021. An informed consent form explained the survey's purpose, emphasizing anonymity and warning that some of the questions may cause psychological distress. Participants were advised that they could elect not to answer any question and/or drop out of survey participation at any time. They were provided with links to Light upon Light's confidential helpline number and contact information for the researchers. SPSS statistical package

(Version 21) was used for all analyses reported below.

6 Results

6.1 Demographics

Participants were 54 self-identified Incels, aged between 18 and 48 years old ($M=26.9$; $SD=7.7$). Participants' gender is reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender of participants. Note: one participant did not select an answer.

Male	Female	Prefer not to answer
52 (98%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

Participants' ethnic origins are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Ethnic origin of participants. Note: one participant did not select an answer.

White	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Mixed/Other
23 (43%)	8 (15%)	8 (15%)	2 (4%)	12 (22%)

Whites were the most numerous ethnic group among the study's participants, followed by Mixed/Other, Asian and Hispanic, and Black.

Table 3 reports participants' level of education, ranging from "Some high school" to "Professional/graduate degree."

Table 3: Educational level of participants (percent). Note: three participants (5%) did not select an answer.

Some High School	High School Diploma or Equivalent	Some College	2-year college degree	4-year college degree	Professional / graduate degree
5 (9%)	9 (17%)	15 (28%)	8 (15%)	6 (11%)	8 (14%)

The majority of participants have had some secondary education.

6.2 Mental health

Participants were asked "Have you ever been diagnosed with:" "Depression," "Anxiety," "Autism Spectrum Disorder," and "PTSD" (Yes or No). They were also asked, "How intensely do you experience:" "Depression," "Anxiety," "Autism Spectrum Disorder," and "PTSD," with response options on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=not at all to 5=very much.

Table 4 on the next page summarizes the number (and percent) of participants reporting prior diagnoses—"Diagnosed"—as well as number (and percent) who scored above the minimum of 1 on the 5-point Likert scale when reporting their subjective experience—"Self-Reported"—and the average intensity of participants' subjective experience—"Intensity"—for each of these four psychological conditions.

Table 4: Number (percent) of participants reporting diagnosed or self-reported Depression, Anxiety, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and PTSD, and the mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of the intensity of their subjective experience.

	Depression	Anxiety	ASD	PTSD
Diagnosed	28 (52%)	22 (41%)	17 (32%)	6 (11%)
Self-Reported	49 (91%)	46 (85%)	29 (53%)	22 (40%)
Intensity M (SD)	3.57 (1.27)	3.26 (1.43)	2.36 (1.52)	2.09 (1.56)

Notably from Table 4, participants in this study reported high prevalence of mental health issues, both formally diagnosed and subjectively experienced. Almost all participants (91%) reported experiencing depression, and a similarly high number (85%) reported experiencing anxiety. What's more, participants' average ratings of self-reported intensity of depression and anxiety fell above the 5-point scale's midpoint, indicating that an average participant experienced depression and anxiety between "a lot" and "very much." These findings capture salient psychological distress among the study's participants.

When asked "Have you ever been in psychotherapy?," the majority (36, 67%) said "yes." About a third of participants (18, 33%) said they have not used psychotherapy. Of those 36 individuals who have used psychotherapy in the past, more than half (19, 54%) found it "not at all" helpful. On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=not at all to 5=extremely, the average rating for how helpful participants found psychotherapy was $M=1.94$, $SD=1.31$. In other words, although most Incels in this study reported psychological distress, most (68%) either had not sought psychotherapy or had found it unhelpful.

6.3 History of bullying and persecution

Participants were asked, "Have you ever been bullied" (yes/no): "As a child (before the age of 12)," "As a teenager" (between the ages of 13 and 19)," and "As an adult (after the age of 19)." They were also asked "Have you ever been persecuted as an Incel" (yes/no). Table 5 summarizes the number of participants who reported experiencing bullying within a particular age category, as well as the number of those who reported a history of persecution for Inceldom.

Table 5: History of bullying and persecution among participants. Note: Two participants (4%) did not answer the question about persecution.

	Ever Bullied	Bullied as a child (before 12)	Bullied as a teenager (between 13 and 19)	Bullied as an adult (after 19)	Persecuted as an Incel
Yes	49 (91%)	41 (84%)	43 (88%)	14 (29%)	27 (50%)
No	5 (9%)	31 (57%)	28 (56%)	46 (86%)	25 (46%)

As evident from the results in Table 5, almost all participants in our sample (91%) reported a history of having been bullied. Additionally, a half of participants reported having been persecuted as an Incel.

6.4 Political attitudes and intentions

Four scales were used to assess radical and activist attitudes and intentions among Incels. These included (1) Activist Intentions Scale and (2) Radical Intentions Scale (Moskalenko and McCauley 2009), (3) Incel Ideology scale (Moskalenko et al. 2022), and (4) Incel Radicalization Scale (Moskalenko et al. 2022).

6.5 Activism/Radicalism Intentions Scale (AIS and RIS)

To measure participants' intentions to engage in legal and nonviolent or illegal/violent actions, they were asked to answer questions on the 4-item Activist Intentions Scale and the 4-item Radical Intentions Scale. The four items on the AIS measure willingness to engage in legal/nonviolent actions on behalf of a group or idea (e.g., I would join/belong to an organization that fights for Incels' political and legal rights). The four items on the RIS measure willingness to engage in illegal/violent action in support of a group or idea (e.g., I would continue to support an organization that fights for Incels' political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes resorts to violence). Participants were offered response options on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1=disagree completely" to "5=agree completely."

6.6 Incel Ideology (II)

To measure Incel ideology, we used 12 questions identified as comprising a measure of Incel ideology in previous research. These included four questions about support for the Black Pill ideology (e.g., "Black Pill is objective;" "I believe in Black Pill;") and eight questions about what it means to be an Incel (e.g., "In order for someone to claim they are an Incel, they must be:" "physically unattractive," "not have kissed another person for at least a certain time," etc.). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1=disagree completely" to "5=agree completely."

6.7 Incel Radicalization Scale (IRS)

In addition to the Activist/Radical Intentions scale, we included items assessing radical attitudes and intentions specific to the Incel community. These were used in a survey study of 274 Incels and comprised a single factor interpretable as "radicalization" (Moskalenko et al. 2022). By including these items as well as the Radical Intentions Scale, we wanted to compare participants' scores on both. Thus, on the Incel Radicalization Scale, three questions asked how much participants admired notorious Incel killers for their lethal attacks: "I admire Alex Minassian for his Toronto attack," "I admire Elliot Rodger for his Santa Barbara attack," and "I admire Chris Harper Mercer for his Rosenberg attack" on a 5-point Likert scale ("1=disagree completely... 5=agree completely"). Using the same scale, participants were also asked how much they agreed with the statement, "I would rape if I thought I would get away with it."

As AIS, RIS, II, and IRS all demonstrated high internal consistency and reliability as measured by Cronbach's Alphas, the four scales were averaged across items. Table 6 on the following page lists Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas for the four scales assessing political ideology and intentions.

Table 6 presents average participant ratings (means), and the variability (standard deviations) of their responses to questions on the Activism Intentions Scale (AIS), Radical Intentions Scale (RIS), Incel Ideology scale (II) and Incel Radicalization Scale (IRS). Additionally, Table 6 also lists measures of reliability of each scale (Cronbach's Alphas)

Table 6: Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas for Activist Intentions Scale, Radical Intentions Scale, Incel Ideology Scale, and Incel Radicalization Scale. *Answers on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=disagree completely to 5=agree completely.

	Mean*	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Activist Intention	2.65	1.11	.85
Radical Intention	2.26	1.16	.81
Incel Ideology	2.31	1.86	.79
Incel Radicalization	1.77	.87	.97

that ranged from .79 to .97, demonstrating high intercorrelations of individual items that comprise each of these measures.

Notable from Table 6 is the difference in the average answer on AIS, RIS, and II—each of which was around the 5-point Likert scale's midpoint (2.5)—versus the mean answer on IRS, which was markedly lower at 1.77. Together with the relatively low variability (SD) of responses in IRS, this means the majority of participants rejected Incel-specific violence that IRS represents. In fact, the majority of participants (64%; 35 individuals) had an average score of 1 (not at all) on the IRS scale, indicating that they fully rejected Incel violence. Only nine individuals in our sample (17%) scored above 2.5, the scale's midpoint. In other words, the majority of Incels in this sample (83%) rejected radical attitudes and intentions captured by Incel Radicalization scale.

6.8 Perceived Misconceptions about Incels

An open-ended question asked, "What do you think is the greatest misconception about Incels?" Three participants (6%) did not provide an answer, and 39 (78%) listed more than one perceived misconception. When analyzing responses of the 51 participants who did answer this open-ended question, several trends emerged.

First, a number of participants replied by disputing the belief that Incels are violent. To create a variable capturing this trend, "Dispute Violence," a coding scheme was designed to score "1" for open-ended responses that mentioned violence (murder, terrorism, threat, dangerous) as a misconception, and "0" for those that did not.

Another trend in open-ended responses about misconceptions were mentions of misogyny. To create a variable capturing this trend, "Dispute Misogyny," a coding scheme was developed to assign a value of "1" to open-ended responses that mentioned misogyny (misogyny, bitterness toward women, hatred of women, objectification of women) as a misconception, and "0" to those that did not.

A number of participants mentioned a personality defect that they believe the broader society falsely attributes to Incels. To create a variable capturing this trend, "Dispute Personal Defect," a coding scheme assigned a value of "1" to responses that mentioned negative personality traits (narcissism, entitlement, spoiled, brats), and "0" to those that did not.

Finally, some participants stated that the greatest misconception about Incels was that they were harmless. To create a variable capturing this trend, "Dispute Innocuousness," a coding scheme was developed to assign a value of "1" to these responses (e.g., people underestimate us, we will continue to kill...), and "0" to those that did not.

Fifteen participants (27%) answered in a way that was not easily interpretable or categorizable (e.g., "it's all true," "It's a common misconception that Incels are a movement or

a group,” “That they deserve to be alive”).

Two raters independently coded the responses to the open-ended question, with the resulting average inter-rater reliability of 96%. Table 7 lists the four categories coded from the open-ended question about what Incels believed was the greatest misconception about them, number and percent of participants, and examples of statements for each category.

Table 7: Four categories of responses to the open-ended question about the greatest misconceptions about Incels

Coded category	Number	Example of statement
Dispute Violence	21 (39%)	“That we are violent” “That we are all terrorists” “That all Incels are violent psychos”
Dispute Misogyny	15 (28%)	“That we all hate women” “That we’re always bitter toward women” “That we are all misogynists”
Dispute Personal Defect	13 (24%)	“That Incels are white and spoiled” “That they are all white privileged people that are more entitled than the average person” “That we just need to work on our personality to get laid”
Dispute Innocuousness	3 (6%)	“That we are just nice guys” “people underestimate us, we will continue to kill until we get our government assigned girlfriends” “People underestimate us, they will regret it when the Incel revolution starts”

Notable in Table 7 is the contrast between the number of participants who said that Incels are misperceived as violent (39%) or misogynistic (28%) and those who said Incels are misperceived as innocuous (6%). In other words, in our sample, the majority of Incels (28, 52%) saw Incels as less violent/misogynistic than they are perceived. Only a small minority (3, 6%) believed Incels to be more dangerous than perceived.

6.9 Predictors of Incel Radicalization

In order to identify predictors of radicalization among Incels, we correlated the scales measuring Incel Radicalization (IRS) with Incel Ideology (II), Radical Intention Scale (RIS), Activist Intention Scale (AIS), and scores on variables created from responses to the open-ended question about misconceptions: Dispute Violence (D-V); Dispute Misogyny (D-M); Dispute Innocuousness (D-I) and Dispute Personal Defect. Table 8 reports Pearson’s Correlations among these variables.

Two sets of findings from Table 8 are worth noting. First, the Incel Radicalization Scale (IRS), constructed from four questions specific to this particular population (admiration for three notorious Incel killers and willingness to rape), correlated at .81 with the general measure of Radical Intention. This high inter-correlation validates the Incel Radicalization Scale as indeed capturing a form of radicalization. Another evidence of construct validity of IRS is its positive correlation with the open-ended answers that disputed Incels’ innocuousness (D-I): the more support for Incel killers and willingness to rape, the more likely a participant was to say that Incels were more dangerous than the public perceives them. Finally, significant negative correlations between IRS and open-ended responses that disputed violence (D-V) and disputed misogyny (D-M) offer a third set of evidence of construct validity for the Incel Radicalization Scale: more

Table 8: Pearson Correlations (DF=53) among Incel Radicalization Scale (IRS) and: Radical Intentions Scale (RIS); Activist Intentions Scale (AIS); Incel Ideology (II); Dispute Violence (D-V); Dispute Misogyny (D-M); Dispute Innocuous (D-I) and Dispute Personal Defect.* Correlation significant at $p < .05$ ** Correlation significant at $p < .01$

	IRS	RIS	AIS	II	D-V	D-M	D-I
Radical Intentions Scale	.81**	–	–	–	–	–	–
Activist Intention Scale	.03	.20	–	–	–	–	–
Incel Ideology	-.06	-.04	.34**	–	–	–	–
Dispute Violence	-.30*	-.17	.03	.09	–	–	–
Dispute Misogyny	-.32*	-.41**	-.03	.04	.18	–	–
Dispute Innocuous	.53**	.42**	-.18	-.10	-.19	-.15	–
Dispute Personal Defect	-.09	-.12	.04	.01	-.18	.06	-.14

admiration for Incel killers and willingness to rape correspond to less likelihood of saying that Incels are misperceived as violent or misogynistic. Taken together, these findings suggest that IRS can be a useful tool for practitioners tasked with risk assessment in the Incel population.

Second, Incel Ideology (II) was not correlated with either Incel Radicalization or with Radical Intentions Scale. This suggests that an ideological commitment to the Black Pill ideas and to Incels as a tight-knit community is not a useful predictor of illegal/violent intentions or radical attitudes. In fact, the only significant predictor of Incel Ideology was Activist Intentions. In other words, among participants in this study, a greater commitment to Incel ideology corresponded to a greater commitment to only legal/non-violent action to advance Incels' interests.

7 Discussion

This study reports results from a survey completed by 54 self-identified Incels who connected with the Incel Podcast and expressed interest in counter-radicalization programming of Light Upon Light, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing hate and violence. The questionnaire included questions about participants' mental health (diagnosed and self-reported depression, anxiety, and autism, as well as history of mental health services utilization); history of bullying and persecution; Incel ideology (Black Pill and Incel community boundaries); and radical attitudes and intentions.

7.1 Incel mental health

The high prevalence of mental health problems reported by Incels in this study are consistent with previous (Costello 2022; Moskalenko et al. 2022). On both self-reported and diagnosed psychopathology, Incels in this study demonstrated high rates of anxiety, depression, and autism spectrum disorders. What's more, Incels who reported a formal diagnosis of psychopathology rarely reported relief from utilization of mental health services. This gap between Incels' mental health needs and the existing services' ability to address them points to an important direction for developing Incel-focused mental health interventions that could serve as off-ramps for individuals at risk for radicalization within the Incel community.

Perhaps related to mental health issues among Incels is a high rate of reported history of bullying and persecution. Almost all (91%) of our participants reported having been

bullied, and half (50%) reported having been persecuted for their Incel identity. These findings suggest that a useful resource for early identification and intervention to prevent Incel-based radicalization can be tasking school psychologists and social workers with following up on bullying incidents to identify individuals at risk.

It is important to note that the observed relationships between reported mental health problems and bullying among Incels in this study are not implying a causal pathway between them and Inceldom. Survey data are not suitable for testing causal relationships among the studied variables—in this case, mental health, psychological trauma, and radicalization. One possibility is that individuals afflicted with mental health problems who are bullied and ostracized through their formative years are more likely to be drawn to the Incel online community, where they might feel accepted in contrast to their experiences in school and with other peer groups. Another possibility is that Incel online rhetoric, alienating and hopeless, may trigger or exacerbate mental health problems in individuals who flock to Incel forums. In-depth case studies and longitudinal studies would be needed to tease apart these interpretations. At the same time, the correlations observed in our research should encourage mental health providers and security services to begin thinking about how best to address the psychological trauma and mental health issues within the Incel population.

7.2 Incel ideology and radicalization

One of the study's goals was to elucidate the relationship between Incel ideology and radical attitudes and intentions. We found that radicalization and ideology among Incels were not significantly correlated. In other words, strong adherence to Incel ideology did not predict radical attitudes or radical intentions among Incels. This finding is consistent with research into Islamist radicalization, which found that only a tiny minority of those who held radical Jihadist ideas engaged in radical action (Sageman 2021; Fajmonová, Moskalenko, and McCauley 2017).

That is not to say that the Incel community poses no danger. In our sample, we observed a small minority of Incels who scored high on Radical Intentions Scale and on Incel Radicalization scale. These same individuals tended to express beliefs that the broader public underestimates the danger from Incel community. This finding is consistent with existing research on Incel online activity that found that a small, vocal subset of the larger group of users were responsible for most activity and posted most hateful content (Jaki et al. 2019; Baele, Brace, and Coan 2019). However, it is important to keep these data in perspective. Most participants in our study, including those who strongly endorsed Incel ideology, rejected radical attitudes and radical intentions, scoring on the lowest end of the 5-point Likert scale that measured radicalization.

One important takeaway from this study is the statistical validation of the Incel Radicalization Scale (IRS)—a measure of radicalization specific to the Incel population. The four-item measure included three questions about admiring notorious Incel killers (Rodger, Minassian, and Harper-Mercer) and one question about willingness to rape if one could get away with it. A correlation of .81 with the well-established and broadly validated Radicalism Intentions Scale (Moskalenko and McCauley 2009; Pavlović, Moskalenko, and McCauley 2021) suggests the Incel Radicalization Scale can be a useful diagnostic and predictive tool in the arsenal of practitioners and security professionals tasked with early identification and prevention of threats from the Incel population.

Unlike existing measures of radicalization, IRS contains questions that are relevant and salient to Incels, making their engagement with them more likely. And questions about admiration for notorious Incel killers should elicit less suspicion than more traditional questions about willingness to participate in illegal and violent political action. Thus, IRS

can serve as a useful early detection tool to measure radicalization among individuals who self-identify as Incels and are deemed vulnerable to radicalization (perhaps based on their online activity).

7.3 Implications

Our findings add to recent research (Moskalenko et al. 2022) in suggesting that news stories about Incel killers do not adequately represent the larger Incel population, the majority of which reject violence. Because Incels tend to be reclusive, news stories about Incel killers are often the only information an average person (and even security professionals) have about Incels. This disproportionate representation in the public's mind makes public perception of Incels vulnerable to "availability heuristic"—a cognitive bias that relies on immediately available examples when considering a topic or population (Schwarz et al. 1991). Salient and frightening, news stories about Incel killers offer immediately available examples of dangerous Incels, which in turn can increase the perception of threat from the Incel community (Keller, Siegrist, and Gutscher 2006).

However, in this study we observed that the majority of Incels reject violence as a course of action for themselves and denounce violence of the three notorious Incel killers. At the same time, most Incels in this study reported a history of bullying and/or persecution, as well as mental health struggles, including depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorders.

Given these parameters, there is little warrant for classifying Incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them. Instead, the professional community tasked with preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and mental health professionals should seek to design interventions that would address Incels' unique psychological needs, which may include social deficits, a history of psychological trauma, and extreme isolation.

Our data did capture a troubling minority of Incels who embrace the most violent manifestations of the Incel subculture, glorifying Incel killers and fantasizing about raping and inflicting violence themselves. The newly validated Incel Radicalization Scale can be a useful measure for early detection of individuals vulnerable to radicalization to violent Incel action.

7.4 Limitations and future directions

One of the limitations of this study is its small number of participants. Studies with bigger samples of Incels should try to replicate our findings to test their reliability.

Another limitation is that participants in this study were self-selected on two different variables: first, they chose to interact with the Incel podcast, and then they chose to connect with Light Upon Light's interventionists. It is unclear how representative these 54 individuals are of the broader Incel community. Future research should explore whether similar patterns of results can be obtained with other samples of Incels.

Finally, it is possible that a high prevalence of mental health issues discussions on Incel forums creates a kind of "demand characteristic," normalizing and even encouraging those who wish to belong to the Incel community to express mental health problems. It is important to validate our findings of high rates of mental health problems with interviews or case studies that can establish more objectively whether self-reported mental health problems can be corroborated by official health records or through confirmation from family, teachers, or peers.

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Data for this study are not yet available to share with other researchers, pending their continued exploration by the researchers.

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Ethical Standards

The study "Predictors of radical intentions among Incels: A survey of 54 self-identified Incels" has been formally exempted from IRB review, based on Subpart A, Section §46.104, 3(i)A of HHS Office of Human Subject Research. An informed consent form explained the survey's purpose, emphasizing anonymity and warning that some of the questions may cause psychological distress. Participants were advised that they could elect not to answer any questions and/or drop out of survey participation at any time. They were provided with links to Light upon Light's confidential helpline number and contact information for the researchers.

Keywords

Incel; Involuntarily Celibate; Radicalization; Ideology; Psychopathology; Trauma; Extremism; Mental Health.

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. Do you consider yourself an Incel (yes/no)
2. Have you ever been persecuted as an incel? (yes/no)
3. Have you ever been bullied (check all that apply)
 - (a) As a child (before the age of 12)
 - (b) As a teenager (between the age of 13 and 19)
 - (c) As an adult (after the age of 19)

1=not at all 2=a little 3=somewhat 4=a lot 5=very much

4. I believe in Black Pill
5. Black Pill is objective
6. Black Pill is refreshing
7. Black Pill is comforting
8. In order for someone to claim they are an incel, they must be
 - (a) Male
 - (b) Heterosexual
 - (c) Over a certain age
 - (d) A virgin
 - (e) Physically unattractive
 - (f) Have never kissed another person
 - (g) Have not had sex in at least some time (e.g. 6 months)
 - (h) Be an outcast of society (a “sufferer”)

How intensely do you experience:

1=not at all 2=a little 3=somewhat 4=a lot 5=very much

9. Depression
10. Anxiety
11. PTSD
12. Autism-Spectrum disorders

Have you ever had a formal diagnosis for any of the following (check all that apply)

13. Depression
14. Anxiety
15. PTSD

- 16. Autism-Spectrum disorders
- 17. Have you ever been in psychotherapy? (yes/no)
- 18. If yes, how helpful have you found it?

1=not at all 2=a little 3=somewhat 4=a lot 5=very much

Please answer the following questions about the group you just named, using the scale below:

1=disagree completely 2 3=neutral 5=agree completely

- 19. I would join/belong to an organization that fights for incels' political and legal rights
- 20. I would donate money to an organization that fights for incels' political and legal rights
- 21. I would volunteer my time working (i.e. write petitions, distribute flyers, recruit people, etc.) for an organization that fights for incels' political and legal rights
- 22. I would travel for one hour to join in a public rally, protest, or demonstration in support of incels
- 23. I would continue to support a person or an organization that fights for incels' political and legal rights even if they sometimes break the law
- 24. I would continue to support a person or an organization that fights for incels' political and legal rights even if they sometimes resort to violence
- 25. I would participate in a public protest against oppression of incels even if I thought the protest might turn violent
- 26. I would attack police or security forces if I saw them beating incels

1=disagree completely 2 3=neutral 4 5=agree completely

- 27. I admire Chris Harper Mercer for his Rosenberg attack
- 28. I admire Alek Minassian for his Toronto attack
- 29. I admire Elliot Rodger for his Santa Barbara attack
- 30. I would rape if I thought I would get away with it
- 31. What do you think is the biggest misconception about incels? (Open-ended)
- 32. Age
- 33. Gender
- 34. Ethnic group (White, Hispanic, Black, East Asian, South Asian)
- 35. Education (Some High School; High school; Some college; B.A.; Advanced/professional degree)