

# **Study challenges prevailing stereotypes, provides new insights into incel community**

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A new study offers unprecedented insights into the incel (involuntary celibate) community, uncovering critical facts that challenge prevailing stereotypes and expand our understanding of this controversial

subculture.

Led by researchers from Swansea University and the University of Texas at Austin, this study is the most comprehensive to date, surveying 561 participants across the UK and US, in collaboration with the UK's Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE).

Incels are a subgroup of men who struggle with forming sexual or romantic relationships, often creating a sense of identity around this perceived inability. In recent years, there has been a small but growing number of violent attacks that have been attributed to individuals who identify as incels.

The study, [published](#) in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, reveals a more nuanced portrait of incels, showing that they come from [diverse backgrounds](#), with varied political beliefs and a high prevalence of mental health issues. While many associate incels with far-right ideologies and violent behavior, this research suggests a broader and more complex set of factors contributing to harmful attitudes and beliefs.

Dr. Andrew G. Thomas, Senior Lecturer of Psychology at Swansea University said, "Incels are often stereotyped in the media as young, white, right-wing men who are not in employment, education, or training. When we tested the accuracy of these stereotypes using primary data collection, we discovered misconceptions. The involuntary celibate community contained men with a broad range of characteristics. If we had to point to their most consistent characteristics, it would be incredibly poor mental health and their feelings of bitterness, frustration, and distain towards women—though even these show variation within the sample."

## Key findings

- **Mental health:** A substantial portion of the participants reported experiencing suicidal thoughts, with 37% of incels indicating they had daily suicidal thoughts.
- **Neurodiversity:** This study is the first to use the Autism Spectrum Quotient-10 (AQ-10), a validated screening tool that assesses whether someone should be referred for a formal autism assessment. It showed 30% of participants met the clinical cutoff for referral, indicating a high prevalence of autistic traits, which significantly surpasses the general population's base rate of 1%.
- **Loneliness:** 48% of participants selected the highest response for all three items on the loneliness scale, indicating very high levels of loneliness.
- **Bullying:** 86% of incels reported having experienced some form of bullying, compared to 33% of the general population.
- **Ethnic diversity:** The study included a diverse ethnic representation, with 58% white and 42% identifying as people of color.
- **Political orientation:** On average, incels positioned themselves slightly left of center politically. This challenges the common assumption that incels are predominantly aligned with far-right ideologies.
- **Socioeconomic backgrounds:** Participants came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, with 40.6% identifying as [middle class](#) and 27.1% as lower-middle, challenging the notion that incels are predominantly from lower [socioeconomic backgrounds](#).

- Employment and education: 42.4% were in full-time employment, and 16.4% were in full-time education.
- Age: The average age of study participants was 26. In total, 18% of incels were 30 or older and the oldest in the sample was 73.

The study also reveals two key factors that contribute to the development of harmful attitudes and beliefs among incels. One is linked to high levels of autistic traits, a history of bullying and abuse, and poor self-esteem; the other is associated with anti-social personality traits such as psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, alongside extreme right-wing views.

Dr. Thomas added, "Our findings highlight that there might be subgroups among incels that end up in the community for different reasons. This is important information to know, as these pathways might lend themselves to different interventions. The existence of subgroups might also explain why different bodies, for example the NHS and Prevent, sometimes find it difficult to establish who might be best placed to intervene."

Study co-author Dr. Joe Whittaker, Senior Lecturer of Criminology at Swansea University, said, "Recently, incels have moved to the center of public discussions—in part helped the Netflix show "Adolescence," which has been a global phenomenon. While drama can be a useful tool for facilitating public debate, it is also important to have rigorous academic research to back it up.

"Our study is one of the first that takes a deep dive into a large sample of incels. This means that we were able to make important comparisons between subgroups. Our findings will help to inform policy and practice within the sphere of counter-extremism and help stakeholders to develop effective and appropriate responses."

Fellow co-author William Costello, a researcher in psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, added, "Incels are typically framed in terms of the threat they pose to others, but our findings suggest they may be just as dangerous, if not more so, to themselves. The extraordinarily high rates of suicidal ideation in our sample were among the most alarming findings and demand urgent attention. Likewise, the prevalence of autism traits was much higher than in the general population, pointing to the need for greater clinical attention to neurodiversity within this group."

**More information:** William Costello et al, The Dual Pathways Hypothesis of Incel Harm: A Model of Harmful Attitudes and Beliefs Among Involuntary Celibates, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2025). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-025-03161-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-025-03161-y)

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