

New report aims to prevent incels from turning to violence

July 9 2020, by Geoff McMaster

Two political science students at the University of Alberta have written a background report to help social workers, psychologists and other practitioners prevent involuntary celibates, or "incels," from turning to violence.

The report was released this month by the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, an Edmonton-based think tank that aims to counter [violent extremism](#) in Canada through psychosocial intervention. It is funded by Public Safety Canada and co-founded by the organization's executive director and U of A adjunct political science professor John McCoy.

"A lot of times there's a tendency to paint the whole community of incels as violent, or like some variant of white supremacists," said master's student David Jones, who was co-author of the guide with Zoe Hastings, a recent political science graduate.

"I think we have enough data to challenge those two assertions and approach it a more nuanced way," said Jones.

Those identifying as incels tend to be young men who feel victimized by feminism and their own unattractiveness, blaming both for their inability to form relationships with women, said the report's authors.

"From this grievance, they have developed an ideology that encompasses anti-feminism, misogyny, nihilism and self-abasement," they wrote.

Since 2009, there have been at least 13 public attacks by incels in North America. In Canada four resulted in death—three in Ontario and one in Alberta.

Last February a 17-year-old male armed with a machete stabbed two women and a man at a massage parlour in Toronto, killing 24-year-old Ashley Noell Arzaga. The police later declared it an [act of terrorism](#), because it was inspired by an identifiable ideology.

Despite these high-profile cases, however, the vast majority of incels are not violent, said Jones and Hastings, but could become so without intervention from psychologists or [social workers](#).

"This is a very isolated group of individuals, especially outside of their online community," said McCoy, who supervised Jones and Hastings in the writing of "Involuntary Celibates: Background for Practitioners."

"For them, building awareness of the availability of social services—in a way that is anonymous, accessible and as free from stigma as possible—is an important first step," he said.

The goal of practitioners is to "understand the perspective of incels, to address it in a way that is not confrontational or dismissive of their views, but slowly pursues disengagement from the ideology and builds pro-[social connections](#)."

Jones and Hastings culled their data from online incel platforms that conduct their own surveys, posting the information online.

The results debunk the common assumption in media reports that incels are closely allied with far-right, white-supremacist ideology, said Jones. While there is indeed some overlap and sharing of "anti-feminist and misogynistic narratives," one poll revealed that only 55 percent of incels

were white.

The authors also found 64 percent of those using online incel platforms were under 25 and 100 percent identified as male.

A majority reported "very high levels of negative mental health," according to Jones and Hastings. About 71 percent reported being bullied as a child, and 74 percent said they "suffer from long-lasting anxiety, stress or emotional distress."

Eighty-eight percent said they were unhappy and 77 percent expressed pessimism about the future.

In an October 2019 poll, 68 percent said they had "seriously considered suicide," and 72 percent reported they were on the autism spectrum.

"These data suggest incels constitute a community with an apparent set of needs who can benefit from the support of human service and mental health practitioners," wrote Jones and Hastings.

They offer a number of suggestions to help practitioners build trust with incels and provide social support, such as seeking to understand their underlying mental health issues without rejecting their belief system.

Those on the [autism spectrum](#), for example, given their struggles with social competency, may be easier to manipulate online, rendering them more susceptible to ideology.

The authors urge practitioners to help their clients engage in "offline, healthy self-improvement activities that naturally align with their own goals and strengths.

"Encouraging the development of natural community connections may

also serve to create feelings of acceptance and self-worth outside of the incel ideology and community."

McCoy stressed that the overall intention of his organization is to design practical intervention programming rigorously informed by evidence.

"We want to make sure it translates into the real world and aids practitioners who are on the front line," he said.

More information: Incels: Background for Practitioners.
[preventviolence.ca/publication ... s-for-practitioners/](https://preventviolence.ca/publication...s-for-practitioners/)

Provided by University of Alberta

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