

## Experts fear rising global ‘incel’ culture could provoke terrorism

**Almost 1,000 references to misogyny and violent action are recorded each day on dedicated incel forums**



Online algorithms are pushing young boys towards right-wing ideology. Photograph: MBI/Alamy

**Mark Townsend** *Home Affairs Editor*

[@townsendmark](#)

Sun 30 Oct 2022 09.00 GMT

Almost 1,000 references to dehumanising misogyny or violent action are recorded each day in the “incelosphere” as the toxicity of male supremacist content continues to intensify.

Analysis of the [incel movement](#) found that online references to inflicting violence and extremely degrading language on dedicated incel forums are running eight times higher than in 2016, when researchers first began tracking misogynist content on the internet.

Academics from the University of Exeter also noted an increasing overlap between incel followers and the far right, with online algorithms blamed for pushing young boys towards extreme rightwing ideology.

#### Advertisement

Lewys Brace, who advises the government on extremism, led a long-term study that recorded, on average, 112 references a day to [extreme misogynistic terms](#) along with words “punch, stab, shoot, attack” in 2016 on dedicated incel forums.

Numbers have steadily increased since, now rising to a daily total of 849 references, prompting fears over the movement’s trajectory following a series of terrorist attacks linked to online misogynists.

The incel – or “involuntarily celibate” – movement is an online subculture in which a misogynistic worldview is promoted by individuals who blame women for their lack of sexual activity.

Incels have been linked to [violent extremism](#) and are classified by the government’s anti-radicalisation strategy, Prevent, as having a “mixed, unstable or unclear” ideology.

The most recent data reveals that such ideologies account for more than half of all referrals to Prevent.

Brace, a lecturer in data analysis at Exeter, said: “The incelosphere is definitely growing and diversifying and has increased in the toxicity of its discussions since 2016.

“The cross pollination of ideologies is helping to drive this.”

He singled out YouTube whose content recommendation algorithms, he claimed, had in the past pushed users “towards increasingly extreme content; particularly in the case of anti-woman/feminist content”.

#### Advertisement

YouTube says its recommendation system is designed to limit the spread of harmful misinformation and point people to authoritative sources.

This week, [research](#) funded by the UK’s Home Office and security and intelligence agencies will reveal the extent of “incel contagion” online and the growing threat posed by male supremacist ideology at a Dublin conference showcasing new studies documenting the internet.

Brace said the volume of references to committing violence should be taken seriously, with more than 50 cases of incel-related violence documented since 2014.

Cases include the murder of five people in August 2021 in [Plymouth by Jake Davison](#), who expressed misogynistic views on online incel forums.



Jake Davison, a participant on incel forums, murdered five people in Plymouth in August 2021. Photograph: PA

Another involves Gabrielle Friel, who in 2019 amassed weapons in preparation for a terrorist attack in Scotland and who “idolised” incel Elliot Rodger, who killed six people in California in 2014. One concerning dynamic, said Brace, was how boys as young as 12 were being drawn into misogynistic ideology.

Recent [police figures](#) reveal that more under-18s were arrested in the 12 months to March 2022 than any other year, with senior counter-terrorism officers describing the trend as of “real concern”.

This month, the Department for Education [published new safeguarding guidance](#) regarding the radicalisation of young people, warning that some may target gender or other protected characteristics, but “do not otherwise

identify with one particular terrorist ideology or cause – for example, involuntary celibates (incels) who direct their anger mainly at women”.

However, the government’s independent reviewer of terrorism legislation cautioned that, despite the rising number of arrests of young people, only one child had been imprisoned for terrorism in the last two years.

Jonathan Hall KC, told the *Observer* that the old-school approach to tackling terrorist offending needed to be recalibrated in the case of children.

“This discrepancy between numbers of arrests and sentences of imprisonment shows that the traditional method of prosecution, conviction and incarceration as a way of managing terrorist risk is no longer in play.”

#### Advertisement

Hall also stressed that, increasingly, a distinction needed to be made between terrorism and something falling short of terrorism, which could be described as extremism.

“Although we have to be careful about trying to codify extremism because, as has been found time and time again, extremism is a concept without natural boundaries.”

Brace said: “At the heart of the debate lies the question of how concerning discussions on online incel spaces are; a question further exacerbated by the manner in which the incel subculture is amorphous and evolving.”

He said the movement had evolved from a series of subreddits to dedicated forums – the “incelosphere” – but which were now spreading across other online spaces, such as Instagram, TikTok, Discord and Twitch.

**ANDREW TATE** is encouraging a violent misogynistic world and encouraging such on Tik Tok he is now a global name, a deeply unpleasant character negatively influencing the minds of young lads