# Netflix drama Adolescence reveals incel subculture’s troubling embrace of unemployment



The critically acclaimed Netflix drama *Adolescence* has helped illuminate the often-misunderstood subculture of incels, or involuntary celibates, primarily composed of young men who define themselves by their inability to form romantic or sexual relationships. This online subculture reflects a broader societal issue concerning mental health and socio-emotional well-being, revealing an intricate interplay between loneliness, employment, and identity.

Recent research from McGill University, dissecting discussions on incel forums, highlights the alarming consequences of a pervasive aversion to employment within this group. The study uncovers that a significant portion of incels—up to 30 per cent—are not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET). The findings reveal a troubling community culture where unemployment is often celebrated as a commitment to the incel identity. Within these online discussions, maintaining NEET status is not merely a logistic choice but a badge of honour. As sociologist Eran Shor, co-author of the study published in *Gender, Work & Organization*, notes, "They use employment status to assess the degree of commitment of their peers to incel identity and often encourage other incels to embrace a life of unemployment and isolation."

This aversion to work is often rationalised with the belief that lacking a female partner renders the pursuit of traditional success pointless. The internal policing prevalent in these forums serves as a reinforcement mechanism, discouraging any attempts to engage with the outside world through work or education. Only a minority of participants express a desire to improve their situation, branding those who do as "fakecels."

The implications of these findings are dire, as unemployment and disengagement can foster a cycle of social isolation, which, as other studies have shown, can further exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression among incels. Research has demonstrated that incels report heightened levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety, alongside lower self-esteem compared to their non-incel peers. Many internalise rejection, fostering a desolate social environment that can lead to dangerous patterns of behaviour.

The necessity for decisive intervention becomes clear. Simple punitive measures or outright bans on incel communities may prove ineffective; instead, a nuanced approach is needed. The McGill researchers advocate for a multi-pronged strategy that incorporates education, job training, and mental health support. This aligns with findings from other studies indicating that interventions focused on mental health could be a more effective means of reducing harm than traditional counter-terrorism measures.

As Shor suggests, "Long-term change will require challenging harmful narratives about masculinity, relationships, and success." This extends beyond addressing employment barriers; it necessitates a systemic change in how society interacts with and understands this marginalised subculture. By fostering constructive dialogue and encouraging socio-emotional engagement, it may be possible to reintegrate these young men into societal frameworks—transforming a culture of isolation into one of connection and support.

The depth of the issue underscores the importance of tailored mental health interventions, particularly as studies indicate a significant mistrust among incels towards mental health professionals. Acknowledging the specific narratives and emotional landscapes navigated by these individuals is essential. Thus, fostering a culture of understanding rather than alienation is vital for breaking the cycles of pain perpetuated within this subculture.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 4, 5
5. Paragraph 2
6. Paragraphs 2, 3, 6
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.miragenews.com/research-explores-incels-aversion-to-work-and-1459512/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363484489_Levels_of_Well-Being_Among_Men_Who_Are_Incel_Involuntarily_Celibate> - This study examines the well-being of men who identify as involuntary celibates (incels). It finds that incels report higher levels of loneliness, lower life satisfaction, and a greater tendency for interpersonal victimhood compared to non-incels. The research highlights the need for targeted mental health interventions to address these issues within the incel community.
3. <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/press-office/news-events/news/2024/02/mental-health-support-may-be-a-key-route-to-reducing-incel-harm-worlds-largest-study-of-incels-finds.php> - A comprehensive study commissioned by the Commission for Countering Extremism and conducted by Swansea University explores the mental health status and beliefs of incels. The findings suggest that mental health support is more effective than counter-terrorism measures in addressing incel-related harm, emphasizing the importance of mental health interventions.
4. <https://www.psypost.org/incels-tend-to-have-a-desolate-social-environment-and-are-more-likely-to-internalize-rejection-study-finds/> - Research published in Current Psychology indicates that incels experience higher levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety, along with lower self-esteem compared to non-incels. The study also reveals that incels are more likely to internalize rejection and feel isolated, which may exacerbate their mental health challenges.
5. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7171845/> - This position paper discusses how social stigma contributes to unemployment among individuals with mental health issues. It highlights that negative attitudes from employers and anticipated discrimination can lead to job loss and decreased motivation to seek employment, underscoring the need for destigmatizing interventions.
6. <https://www.citedrive.com/en/discovery/dont-work-for-soyciety-involuntary-celibacy-and-unemployment/> - A qualitative analysis of over 1,200 comments from an incel forum reveals that many members promote unemployment and social disengagement as a form of retaliation against society. The study suggests that unemployment can be both an ideological stance and a consequence of perceived marginalization within the incel community.
7. <https://www.psypost.org/incels-experience-a-complex-combination-of-psychiatric-symptoms-but-feel-they-cannot-be-helped-by-mental-health-professionals/> - Research published in Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression indicates that incels report higher rates of mental health disorders compared to the general male population. Despite these challenges, the study suggests that incels often distrust mental health professionals, highlighting the need for tailored mental health interventions.