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The Pandemic as Incels see it

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Executive summary

CCC COVID Briefing Papers are an ongoing series of short-form, open access reports aimed at academics, policymakers, and practitioners, which aim to provide an accessible summary of our ongoing research into the effects which the coronavirus pandemic (and government responses) are having on cybercrime.

In this report, we examine the effects of the pandemic lockdown on the online discourse of people defining themselves as incels by analysing their chat on `incels.co` and `incels.net`, the two most active English-language forums dedicated to this online subculture. We have collected more than five million posts on these forums as part of our ExtremeBB dataset, and we present a preliminary snapshot. We observe a substantial increase in the number of posts and threads during lockdown; however, the number of members making these posts dropped slightly. We also find a substantial intensification of hostile and violent discourse in these forums, particularly in discussions of the potential for (as they see it) favourable changes to society and their place in it due to the pandemic.

Incel and extremist ideology

The incel (involuntary celibate) subculture is a loose association of online groups united by an extreme misogynist ideology, consisting of men who adopt a nihilistic, anti-feminist view of the world in which they, as socially and physically unattractive men, are denied sexual relationships. They have evolved an online community characterised by extreme misogyny, violent fantasies, hate speech and far-right extremism. There is some evidence from countries with a surplus of men over women that this surplus is associated with instability and violence, particularly against women [1]. Since 2014, about a dozen murders (including at least six mass killings) have been committed by male perpetrators who self-identified as incels, including the Isla Vista killings in 2014, the Toronto Van attack in 2018 and most recently the Hanau shootings in early 2020. Incels are part of a broader so-called 'manosphere' culture associated with far-right ideology and online harassment campaigns such as Gamergate.

Activity: posts, threads and posters

The effects of the pandemic (and lockdown) are evident in our data sources. We observe a rapid, but fairly short-lived increase, in the number of posts and threads on incel forums, both peaking in April 2020, before slipping back quickly afterwards (see Figure 1). However, the number of members contributing these posts did not increase, but even dropped slightly. This suggests that a subset of existing members became suddenly more active during lockdown.
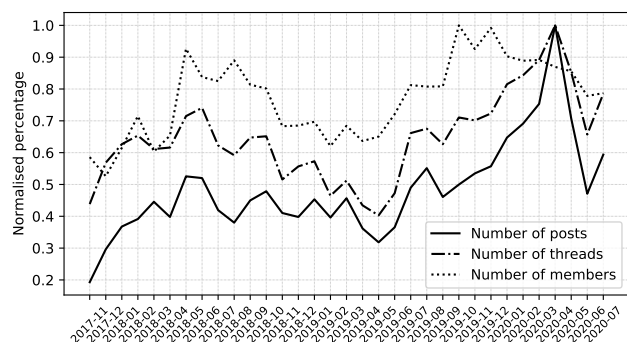

Figure 1: Volume of posts, threads and posters

Incel thoughts

We observe a significant increase in murderous fantasies during the pandemic. The number of posts relating to killing that mention 'chads' and 'stacys' (attractive men and women) took off, peaks in April 2020, and drops away quickly afterwards (see Figure 2). There are many more such posts about men than about women, with the greatest difference observed in April 2020.
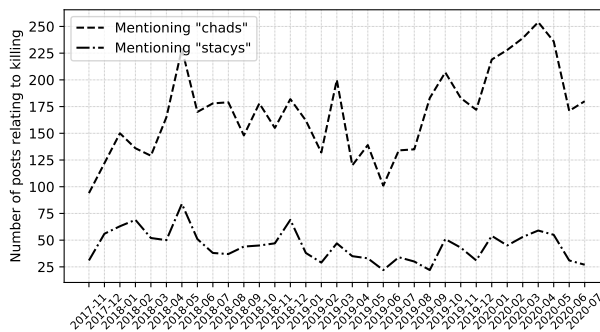

Figure 2: Murderous fantasies

Many other comments exhibit strong hostility towards sexually attractive men and women. They call Coronavirus 'Corona-chan' (*chan* is a Japanese word implying cute girls) and hope that the virus will reduce the number of attractive men, giving incels more chance of dating.

> *"Corona must be on our side since it will probably kill chads and rosties the most, since they can't stop partying and having sex with strangers." // "Corona is the nawalt bro. Have faith. She will take care of incels and kill chad and boomers." // "I hope it kills off all the chads instead so that we could have a chance." // "Please, Corona, come kill chads and stacies" // "Hoping the coronavirus will only kill chads, stacys and everyone with an SMV above 5/10" // "I want Corona to kill chads primarily."*

But some fear that the men who beat them at the dating game will also beat the virus.

> *"I bet with our luck, this new virus will only target sub4 males. Since we lost the gene lottery, most likely our immune system is way weaker than Chad's, who's immune system can kill off any disease or STD." // "The virus will mainly kill oldcels and unhealthy normies. Shit has to really mutate to kill chads and other genetically superior humans" // "I think it's the opposite. Corona chan is more likely to kill me than chads because of my subhuman gene."*

They also point out that thanks to Coronavirus, attractive people will also experience the loneliness of being isolated, as incels normally do.

> *"A silver lining from this coronavirus pandemic is that normies, especially women, can now finally get to experience what we incels experience on a day to day basis. And guess what? They're losing it."*

Conclusions

The outbreak intensified the incel subculture in April 2020, no doubt because lockdowns led to people spending more time online. The pandemic thus fueled self-pity, extremist fantasies and hostility towards attractive men and women. This intensification appears to be a rise in activity by existing users rather than new, casual, contributors. In future briefings, we will analyse these topics in more detail.

[1] N. Diamond-Smith, K. Rudolph, "The association between uneven sex ratios and violence: Evidence from 6 Asian countries", *PLOS One* 13(6), June 1 2018