



RESULTS

Option 1  
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ZERO

TOLERANCE

CAMPAIGNING FOR 30 YEARS

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# Misogynistic extremism is spreading amongst young people

Image credit: Chi Wai Cheung

The internet has made it possible for communities of extreme misogyny to **spread rapidly across borders** on an unprecedented scale.

These communities use online spaces to spread messages that justify and incite violence against women and girls. They create content targeted to young men, seeking to radicalise them into extreme misogynistic beliefs. Many indoctrinated young men then perpetrate harm against their young women peers.

This phenomenon is of growing concern in Scotland. To learn more about it, **we commissioned participatory research to explore young Scottish men's and women's experiences and views of so-called 'incel culture'**. The research was led by [Civic Digits](#), who ran theatre-based activities with young White women and young Black men aged 13-19.

This briefing gives the highlighted findings from this work. The [full report is also available](#) to read.

Incels are a misogynistic online community of men who feel they cannot attract women and are thus hostile towards all women. The term incels is short for 'involuntary celibate'.

Brought to you by Zero Tolerance, Scotland's primary prevention experts, working to end men's violence against women and girls by tackling the root cause: gender inequality.



## Key findings

### **Young men consume misogyny without knowing the content creators are incels.**

All the young people had come across incel content online but whereas the young women consumed content critiquing incels and their extremism and threatening misogyny, the young men were familiar with incel language but not the term 'incel', suggesting that they had absorbed incel ideas without knowing.

### **The young men had a positive view of Andrew Tate.**

The young men were familiar with Tate's views on masculinity but not the charges against him for rape and human trafficking. Tate frames misogyny as a positive, traditional masculine trait. The young men discussed Tate as a positive role model.

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He was composed. Didn't flip out... He's defending himself.  
- young man

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### **Gender stereotypes and expectations put pressure on young people and shape their sense of self and relationships with others.**

Whilst the young women demonstrated a keen awareness of the costs of patriarchal gender roles and a desire to challenge them, the young men appeared more hesitant to engage in this kind of critical reflection. This points to the need for more targeted interventions that can support them in developing alternative visions of masculinity.

### **The young women viewed pornography as a key influence on men's attitudes to women.**

The young women said they regularly witnessed male peers consuming violent sexual content, often in the classroom. They believe it makes young men feel entitled to (often violent) sex.

“

[Pornography] promotes violence and desensitisation.  
- young woman

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Image credit: Chi Wai Cheung

## The path to becoming an incel

Overall, the project evidenced the very gendered pressures faced by young Scots today.

The young women faced a **daily assault of misogyny** online from social media and pornography.

The young men are targeted with content **pressuring them to be 'successful men'** and defining success as being wealthy, muscular, and attractive to the opposite sex.

The young people believed these messages about being an 'alpha man', as well as **pornography**, act as the beginning of **online grooming of young men into radical misogynistic thinking**.

Incel influencers' definitions of masculinity align with the wider gender stereotypes held by our society. The rise of incel extremism must be understood as a symptom of the wider patriarchal attitudes and rigid gender norms that permeate society.

So, when a young man looks for reasons for feelings of loneliness or romantic rejection from women and is told that it is because of women and feminism **he is already primed to believe it**. Through incel content he is offered a community of lonely men, who are able to give him an identity, a place where he feels he can belong. As he continues to consume this content and spend time in this community he may, through a process of desensitisation, **become ready to take part in violent expressions and even violent actions towards women**.

“

Being exposed to something too much makes something normal, so it doesn't shock you any more.

- young man

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## The solution: tackle the root cause

**Together, we can prevent online misogynistic radicalisation and end men's violence against women and girls but we must act now.**

- Allow young men to critically consider misogyny and the pressures of masculinity in a judgement free, creative space.
- Ensure all young people receive relationships and sex education that includes consent and pleasure.
- Provide safe ways for young people to explore how their online experiences affect their identities and lives

## We are calling on the Scottish Government to:

1. Make it **compulsory and statutory to provide comprehensive, gender-equal, culturally sensitive education in relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP)**, so that young people do not have to resort to searching for information online.
2. **Strengthen ties between the youth work and education sectors**, so that every young person in Scotland has a youth worker they can talk to and ask for information. Youth workers' skills in relationship building and creating safe, non-judgmental relationships are vital.
3. **Collaborate with UK and international partners to regulate online platforms**, reducing the amount of harmful content and preventing algorithms from promoting it.