Involuntary celibacy is associated with poor social & psychological health...(and it’s worse for males).

Involuntarily celibate adults: Wellbeing, perceived desirability to mates, and drug use motivations

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INTRODUCTION

- The ability to have sexual intimacy and activity when desired is a nearly fundamental and universal human need.
- Risky sexual behavior among people who use drugs (PWUDs) has been investigated as has the importance of social support among PWUDs or who are in recovery however...
- Sexual intimacy and activity, or the lack thereof in the form of involuntary celibacy, receives no attention despite the important role that it plays in health and well-being.

We posit that both the acts of touch and intercourse as well as the social ability to attract a mate when intimacy is desired have effects on psychological well being and on health behaviors, including drug use.

METHODS

- Amazon Mechanical Turk was used to survey US adults with past-six-month use of alcohol or opioids/stimulants between September 2020-March 2021 in order to examine social conditions, health, and drug use among involuntarily celibate adults and sexually active adults.
- We used 2-way ANOVA and logistic regression to examine demographic and psychosocial attributes associated with being involuntarily celibate (vs. sexually active), and the effects of sex/gender.
- In addition to validated measures, we piloted three new scales of: social motivations for drug use and perceived power, and perceived desirability to potential mates. We used exploratory factor analyses to determine appropriate factors for constructs measured by each scale.

RESULTS

- The final sample (N=2,615) was 36.7 years old on average, 58.5% female, 78.6% White, 21.4% heterosexual, and 70.3% currently partnered. 12.2% (n=318) identified as involuntarily celibate; only 8.2% of this group (1.0% of total sample) belonged to the online “Incels” troll culture.
- Psychosocial and health indicators were worse for involuntarily celibate (vs. sexually active) respondents, but effects frequently tended to be worse for men.
- Some stereotypic gender-specific factors were associated with involuntary celibacy and perceived desirability to potential mates.

Participants

For women, being older was associated with being involuntarily celibate, but not for men. For men, shorter height was related to being involuntarily celibate. For both men and women, weighing more was associated with being involuntarily celibate.

Number of children mattered for women, not men, with respect to involuntarily celibate status.

Being involuntarily celibate was related to poorer mental health for men AND women, but whenever an interaction is present, these effects are greater for men than women.

Involuntary celibate respondents were more likely to be actively seeking a relationship, but this effect is greater in females.

Being involuntarily celibate was related to greater likelihood of using alcohol as well as other drugs for specific social purposes, but this was greater among males.

Across all factors of perceived desirability to potential mates, the effect of involuntary celibacy on perceiving oneself as less desirable to a potential mate is only significant for males (involuntarily celibate males perceived themselves as less desirable).

Not having a full-time job and not earning more than the median household income was associated with being involuntarily celibate for men, but not women.

Being bisexual was associated with men being involuntarily celibate, but not women (though more women reported being bisexual overall).

Involuntarily celibate men and women used more alcohol and other drugs for specific social purposes, but this was greater among males.

Males who reported being involuntarily celibate perceived themselves as more introverted, though with women there was no effect.

Involuntarily celibate males also scored higher on measures of submissiveness.