# End violence: Women's rights and safety online

## Analysis of incidents of technology-related violence against women reported on the "Take Back the Tech!" Ushahidi platform

*Association for Progressive Communications (APC)*

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# Table of contents

# 1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of data concerning violence against women (VAW) online collected using the Association for Progressive Communications' (APC) online mapping tool.[1] The purpose of the mapping tool, which was set up as part of APC's "End Violence: Women's rights and safety online" project, was to improve APC's existing framework for categorising online rights violations, and develop a deeper understanding of the nature and consequences of technology-related VAW.

This report is intended primarily as a quantitative overview of the cases reported, with some qualitative illustration. The data is analysed from 2012 to mid-2014.

# 2. Summary of findings

- A total of 1126 cases were reported over the period. These included cases that had appeared in other media, and were uploaded onto the site, anecdotal cases of others that had experienced VAW, and cases reported by the person who had experienced VAW herself.

- The data suggests that the age groups 18-30 and younger are the most vulnerable age groups online.

- The identities of those who experience VAW online appear to fall into at least three general categories: someone involved in an intimate relationship; a professional with a public profile interested in public expression or exchange (including writers, researchers, activists and artists); and a survivor/victim of physical assault.

- The majority of cases reported are likely to come from North America, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Europe. It may be that this reflects the level at which gender equality and rights violations are understood, debated and accepted in the different regions (e.g. possibly accounting for the low number of reports from Africa). It also potentially suggests project reach and internet access issues.

- The majority of the cases reported are perpetrated by someone known to the person experiencing the violation (over 40%), followed by someone unknown (30%) and then by a group of people (14%).

- The majority of harms reported involve "emotional harm" (33%), followed by "harm to reputation" (19%) and "invasion of privacy" (13%).

- "Physical harm" is high at 13%, confirming that the internet is being used as an intermediate communication platform for direct physical violations, as opposed to the violation remaining online. Both "dating with the intention to trap someone" and "sweet talking with the intention to trick someone" were identified as having a high frequency in the Spanish, French and Portuguese reports. In a number of instances, death, abduction or suicide resulted.

- The platforms on which the most cases of violations are reported are Facebook (nearly 26%) and through the use of mobile phone (19%).

- Service providers are generally not responsive to online harms reported. It is likely that provider action is taken in only a third of the cases reported to a service.

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[1] https://www.takebackthetech.net/mapit

- While a number of cases are reported to authorities (69% of actions taken), less than half of them appear to be investigated by the authorities (nearly 41%). This suggests a legal disconnect between online harm and authorities such as the police or the criminal law framework. This is possibly due to online harm not being taken seriously enough by authorities such as the police, or the lack of a sufficient policy environment that protects the rights of those harmed online.

- Given the quantitative data captured, the most typical profile of a woman experiencing harm online can be suggested:
    - She is likely to be between the ages of 18 and 30.
    - The violation is likely to be perpetrated by someone known by her.
    - It is most likely to happen on Facebook.
    - It is mostly likely to be a form of emotional harm.
    - This emotional abuse is likely to be repeated.
    - It is likely to involve threats of violence and abusive comments.
    - She may take action to avoid or stop the violation.
    - She is more likely to go to the police to report the violation rather than report it to Facebook.
    - The police may investigate the case, but are likely not to investigate it.

# 3. Quantitative analysis and profiling

## 3.1. Demographics of women and girls who have experienced technology-related violence

### 3.1.1. Age of person violated

The table below breaks down the age of the person experiencing VAW, cross-referenced with the violator.

| | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | Over 60 | NULL | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A group of people** | 28 | 53 | 21 | 6 | 1 | 51 | 160 |
| **Internet platform provider (e.g. Facebook)** | 4 | 8 | 11 | | | 11 | 34 |
| **Other** | 36 | 40 | 18 | 5 | 1 | 15 | 115 |
| **Someone known** | 110 | 178 | 83 | 2 | 6 | 83 | 462 |
| **Someone unknown** | 110 | 89 | 51 | 18 | 2 | 67 | 337 |
| **State** | | 2 | 2 | | | 14 | 18 |
| **Total** | 288 | 370 | 186 | 31 | 10 | 241 | 1126 |

As can be seen from the table, the majority of the cases reported fall in the 18-30 age group, followed by the "under 18" age group. Together these make up nearly 60% (58.4%) of the number of cases reported where the violator was identified. Harm is also reported reasonably frequently for the 31-45 age group (accounting for 16.5% of the total cases reported), but less so from the age 46 onwards. This picture shifts slightly if we subtract the number of cases where age was not reported (241), leaving the total number of cases where age is identified as 885.

| Age | % of cases where age was reported |
|---|---|
| <18-30 | 74 |
| 31-45 | 21 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 46 and older | 5 |

As this table shows, a majority of cases where harm is reported (nearly 75%) occur to those aged 30 or younger (with the 18-30 age group being the most vulnerable). Those in the 31-45 age group remain exposed to harm online, while the least harm is reported by those aged 46 and older.

There are a number of possible explanations for this data, including that the age group 46 and older is less likely to use the online mapping tool to report online harm. It is also possible that those aged over 60 are not active on the internet in a way that exposes them to harm.

While the age group 18 and younger is exposed to online harm, it is likely that this is most common at higher ages in the category, where young people are internet active and use the internet without support from guardians (e.g. parents, family or teachers). It is difficult to estimate what this age group is, but it is reasonable to say that during ages 0-8 the online activities of many children are monitored and filtered by guardians. It is when young girls become internet independent that they are most likely to be exposed to online harm. One could suggest that the age group 10-30 is the most likely to experience some sort of gender-related harm online, but this would depend on class, access, and societal structures.

### 3.1.2. Nationality of person violated

No exact quantitative data on the nationality of the person violated is reportable given limitations to the data-capturing platform. However, the country in which the violation occurs is captured and visually mapped on the platform itself. From this we can develop at least an impression of the number of cases reported in regions.
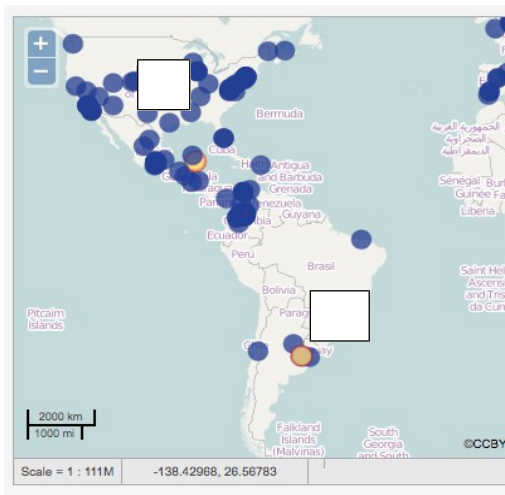


If one considers the visual mapping data and grades this on a scale of 0-2 with 0=low number of reports, 1= medium cluster of reports, and 2=significant cluster of reports, the following table can be constructed:

| | LAC (including | North | Europe | Africa | Asia |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

|  | Central America) | America |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Under 18** | 1-2 | 1-2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| **18-30** | 1 | 2 | 1-2 | 0 | 1-2 |
| **31-45** | 0-1 (due to reports from  Central America) | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **46-60** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **60 and older** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | 4 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 3 |

As this suggests, the majority of the cases reported are from North America, followed by LAC, Europe and Asia. Although this partly corresponds with levels of internet access (e.g. low reporting in Africa), the number of cases reported by region is more likely to suggest levels of engagement with the mapping project (or project reach), as well as reflecting the regional status of the recognition of gender rights (i.e. the concept of gender equality and rights violations needs to be understood and accepted before reporting can occur).

## 3.2. Identities of violator

The table below shows the percentage of cases where the perpetrator of the violations is reported.

| Violation perpetrated by | % of cases reported |
|---|---|
| A group of people | 14 |
| Internet platform provider (e.g. Facebook) | 3 |
| Other | 10 |
| Someone known | 41 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Someone unknown | 30 |
| State | 2 |

At the table shows, the majority of the cases reported are perpetrated by someone known to the person who experiences the violation (over 40%), followed by someone unknown (30%) and then by a group of people (14%) (the assumption is that this group of people could be known or unknown). Violations by the state and internet platform providers[2] are reported to be the lowest.

### 3.3. Harms experienced through technology-related VAW

The following table break down the harm faced. More than one harm can be reported per case.

| | Number of times reported | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Censorship** | 60 | 2 |
| **Emotional harm** | 973 | 33 |
| **Harm to reputation** | 577 | 20 |
| **Invasion of privacy** | 395 | 13 |
| **Loss of identity** | 88 | 3 |
| **Loss of property** | 57 | 2 |
| **Mobility limited** | 117 | 4 |
| **NULL** | 21 | 1 |
| **Physical harm** | 370 | 13 |
| **Sexual harm** | 271 | 9 |

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[2] The assumption is that the "internet platform provider" is felt to be responsible for the direct abuse, as opposed to the space or platform where the abuse occurred.

|  | Number of times reported | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 2929 | 100 |

As the table above shows, the majority of cases (33%) are reported as "emotional harm", followed by "harm to reputation" (20%) and "invasion of privacy" (13%). At also nearly 13%, "physical harm" is strikingly high, suggesting that the internet is being used as an intermediate communication platform for direct physical violations, as opposed to the violation remaining online.

### 3.3.1. Identity of violator with harm faced

The following table cross-references the identity of the violator with the harm faced. More than one harm can be reported per case.

|  | Censorship | Emotional harm | Harm to reputation | Invasion of privacy | Loss of identity | Loss of property | Mobility limited | NULL | Physical harm | Sexual harm | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A group of people | 13 | 162 | 112 | 47 | 19 | 4 | 20 | 2 | 76 | 56 | 511 |
| Internet platform provider e.g. Facebook | 4 | 39 | 27 | 12 | 5 |  | 4 | 3 |  |  | 94 |
| Other | 5 | 78 | 35 | 38 | 3 | 8 | 16 | 1 | 41 | 33 | 258 |
| Someone known | 24 | 390 | 227 | 190 | 35 | 30 | 52 | 6 | 169 | 108 | 1231 |
| Someone unknown | 12 | 281 | 158 | 104 | 26 | 15 | 21 | 9 | 78 | 70 | 774 |
| State | 2 | 23 | 18 | 4 |  |  | 4 |  | 6 | 4 | 61 |

| | Censorship | Emotional harm | Harm to reputation | Invasion of privacy | Loss of identity | Loss of property | Mobility limited | NULL | Physical harm | Sexual harm | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Result** | **60** | **973** | **577** | **395** | **88** | **57** | **117** | **21** | **370** | **271** | **2929** |

### 3.3.2. Top three harms reported

If we consider the top three categories of harm reported – emotional harm, harm to reputation and invasion of privacy – we can create the following table:

| | **Emotional harm** | **Harm to reputation** | **Invasion of privacy** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A group of people** | 162 | 112 | 47 |
| **Internet platform provider (e.g. Facebook)** | 39 | 27 | 12 |
| **Other** | 78 | 35 | 38 |
| **Someone known** | 390 | 227 | 190 |
| **Someone unknown** | 281 | 158 | 104 |
| **State** | 23 | 18 | 4 |
| **Total** | 973 | 577 | 395 |

As the table shows, the majority of violations amongst the top violations reported conform with the earlier observation that they are perpetrated by either someone known, unknown or a group of people. Of interest, however, is that the majority of the cases reported involving an internet platform provider involve the top three harms reported.

**Type of violation by top three categories of harm**

The three tables below break down the type of violation experienced in the top three categories of violations reported. More than one category of harm can be reported per case.

|  | Emotional harm | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Abusive comments** | 185 | 14 |
| **Accessing private data** | 116 | 8 |
| **Deleting, changing or faking personal data, photos/videos** | 37 | 3 |
| **Monitoring and tracking** | 83 | 6 |
| **Other** | 115 | 8 |
| **Repeated harassment** | 299 | 22 |
| **Sharing and/or disseminating private information** | 148 | 11 |
| **Stealing identity, money or property** | 35 | 3 |
| **Taking photo/video without consent** | 145 | 11 |
| **Threats of violence/blackmail** | 191 | 14 |
| **Total** | 1354 | 100 |

As the table above suggests, "repeated harassment" (22%) is the highest reported violation, followed by "threats of violence/blackmail" (14%) and then "sharing and/or disseminating private information" and "taking photo/video without consent", reported roughly equally (11%). That repeated harassment is the most frequent way in which emotional harm occurs potentially suggests that measures for intervention (if taken by the person reporting the case) are not effective.

|  | Harm to reputation | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Abusive comments** | 109 | 13 |
| **Accessing private data** | 74 | 9 |
| **Deleting, changing or faking personal data, photos/videos** | 37 | 4 |
| **Monitoring and tracking** | 29 | 3 |
| **Other** | 48 | 6 |
| **Repeated harassment** | 148 | 18 |
| **Sharing and/or disseminating private information** | 142 | 17 |
| **Stealing identity, money or property** | 19 | 2 |
| **Taking photo/video without consent** | 123 | 15 |
| **Threats of violence/blackmail** | 105 | 13 |
| **Total** | 834 | 100 |

When it comes to harm to reputation, a similar picture emerges: the majority of categories of harms reported involve "repeated harassment" (18%), sharing/disseminating private information (17%), and taking photos or videos without consent (15%).

|  | Invasion of privacy | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Abusive comments** | 116 | 15 |
| **Accessing private data** | 77 | 10 |
| **Deleting, changing or faking personal data, photos/videos** | 22 | 3 |
| **Monitoring and tracking** | 45 | 6 |
| **Other** | 43 | 5 |
| **Repeated harassment** | 156 | 20 |
| **Sharing and/or disseminating private information** | 121 | 16 |
| **Stealing identity, money or property** | 4 | 1 |
| **Taking photo/video without consent** | 91 | 12 |
| **Threats of violence/blackmail** | 97 | 12 |
| **Total** | 772 | 100 |

As the table above shows, repeated harassment (20%), sharing private information (16%), and abusive comments (15%) are the highest types of violations reported that involve an invasion of privacy.

### 3.3.3. Qualitative sample of frequent specific harms not captured by data

A qualitative analysis of reports submitted in Spanish, French and Portuguese, while confirming some of the above quantitative findings, suggests at least two more specific violations that typically occur:

- Date with the intention to trap (or similar): When a person is dating someone they have met through the internet (social networks or other means) and is in fact being set up for a trap. This situation could be very dangerous, given the fact that many of this cases have ended in rape, murder, or the disappearance of the victim. The victims in these kinds of cases are most commonly teenagers or young women (under 18 years, or between 18 and 30 years).

- Sweet talking with the intention to trick (or similar): When a person gets into a relationship with someone over the internet (social networks or other means), and the abuser/violator is not honest about himself, hiding some particular aspect of his personality or even giving false data to the victim. This kind of situation is of relevance given the fact that there are many cases reported that could fit into this category. This kind of case is more frequent among young women (between 18 and 30 years, or between 31 and 45 years).

## 3.4. How internet intermediaries/technology platform providers are implicated in technology-related VAW

The table below shows the number of times a particular media, internet platform or technology was reported. More than one can be reported per case.

|  | Number of times reported | % of times reported |
|---|---|---|
| **Audio/mp3** | 3 | 0 |
| **Email** | 238 | 7 |
| **Facebook** | 901 | 26 |
| **Forum, listing or ads** | 108 | 3 |
| **Mobile phone** | 669 | 19 |
| **Newspaper** | 42 | 1 |
| **NULL** | 96 | 3 |
| **Online chats (e.g. Skype, IM)** | 72 | 2 |
| **Other** | 526 | 15 |
| **Other social networks** | 219 | 6 |
| **Radio** | 17 | 0 |

|  | **Number of times reported** | **% of times reported** |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| **Television** | 53 | 2 |
| **Twitter** | 193 | 6 |
| **Video** | 162 | 5 |
| **Webcam** | 82 | 2 |
| **YouTube** | 87 | 3 |
| **Total** | 3468 |  |

As the table suggests, most violations reported involve Facebook (26%) and mobile phones (19%).

### 3.5. Overview of general actions taken in response to online harm

If one considers the total number of reported cases (1126), and distils incidents where action was taken by the person reporting the case, one gets the table below. As it shows, only 56% of those experiencing harm are likely to take action, suggesting the need for awareness raising and empowerment on the alternatives for effective action when online harm occurs.

|  | **Number of cases where action taken** | **% of cases where action taken** |
|---|---|---|
| **Blocking aggressor on platform or technology** | 48 | 8 |
| **Dialogue or confrontation of aggressor** | 65 | 10 |
| **Leaving/changing platform** | 31 | 5 |

| Reported to police/state enforcement authority | 441 | 69 |
|---|---|---|
| Reporting abuse to provider/platform | 49 | 8 |
| Total | 634 | |

As the table also suggests, the most likely action to be taken by the person experiencing the violation is to report it to the authorities (69%) compared to the service provider (just 8%), possibly indicating that service providers are not seen to be sufficiently responsive in terms of one person violating the rights of another. The data also suggests that the person reporting the case is also more likely to enter into a dialogue with the aggressor than report the incident to the service provider, suggesting the potential of further exposure to harm.

The data also suggests that while 69% of cases are reported to authorities, less than half of them appear to be investigated by the authorities (nearly 41%). This suggests a legal disconnect between online harm and authorities such as the police or the legal framework. This is possibly due to online harm not being taken seriously enough by authorities such as the police, or the lack of a sufficient policy environment that protects the rights of those harmed online.

While 8% of the cases where action was taken were reported to a service provider, the service provider only responded to a third of the incidents reported.

### 3.6. Basic profile of person most likely to experience harm online

From the above, the following picture can be sketched of a woman likely to experience online harm the most frequently, according to the data. This does not account for more severe cases of online harm, sometimes resulting in rape, murder or suicide.

Most typical profile of a woman experiencing harm online:

- She is likely to be between the ages of 18 and 30.
- The violation is likely to be perpetrated by someone known by her.
- It is most likely to happen on Facebook.
- It is mostly likely to be a form of emotional harm.
- This emotional abuse is likely to be repeated.
- It is likely to involve threats of violence or abusive comments.
- She *may* take action to avoid or stop the violation.
- She is more likely to go to the police to report the violation rather than report it to Facebook.
- The police may investigate the case, but are likely not to investigate it.

While the above suggests the profile of a women most likely to experience online harm, a qualitative sample of the cases reported builds on this picture and suggests at last three typical "identities" of someone experiencing online harm, as the table below shows:

| Identity of person | What is at stake | What happens | Consequences | Possible attitude towards ICTs following incident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Someone involved in intimate relationship | Intimacy and trust | Involves use of ICTs for private expression, the content of which is then exploited publicly by someone who was intimately involved with that person. | Can result in extreme consequences (e.g. suicide), and widespread sense of public shame. May require severe action such as changing name and address. | Lack of trust in technology; withdrawal from using technology for intimate exchange and expression; shame because of original use of ICTs, so retreat from online spaces. |
| Professional, often involved in public expression. Involves activists, journalists, writers, researchers, musicians, actors. Anyone with a public profile or interest in public exchange. | Freedom of expression, personal and political | Harassment, threats, silencing through verbal abuse. | Typically appears to result in less extreme consequences for the victims given their public status, a greater sense of empowerment to remedy situation. | More careful use of technology, but see it potentially as a proactive tool for remedy of rights violated. Engagement with technology as a tool for public expression continues. |
| Survivor/victim of physical assault | Physical safety | Involves direct crime, such as filming a gang rape. | Can result in extreme consequences, such as suicide of the person violated. | Psycho-social affects, but also some evidence of ICTs being used as method of remedy, storytelling and sharing of potential for harm with others. |

The above table can be illustrated through the following case summaries.

### *Someone involved in an intimate relationship*

**Case 1:** A woman in Los Angeles, California, found that a month after she and her boyfriend broke up, her naked picture had been posted on her Facebook profile. (Her ex-boyfriend contends the picture got out because his computer was hacked.) It went viciously viral.

Less than a year later, her photo was on some 200 websites, as were her name, email address and place of business. She tried to get the photos removed, she changed her phone number, she changed her name, she quit her job, she thought about suicide.

**Case 2:** A TV star, 27, told friends she feels humiliated after discovering a six-second clip of her performing a sex act on a mystery man was circulated between hundreds of people using mobile phones. She is understood to have confronted the man, whose face cannot be seen in the clip, after it was leaked.

A source said: "She is distraught that somebody who she trusted has allowed this to happen. She is furious it has been sent to so many people. It was a private moment and was never intended to be seen by anybody else. But there is nothing she can do to stop it. Laws need to be changed to put an end to revenge porn."[3]

### *Professional, often involved in public expression*

**Case 1:** A journalist, senior editor of *Ebony* online magazine, was attacked via social networks because of comments she made on current issues. The attacks meant to harm her reputation and diminish her because of her race. A support campaign via Twitter produced 20,000 tweets and uplifted the journalist in her position.[4]

**Case 2:** In February 2014 it was reported that a Kashmir-based musical band formed by girls had been facing online threats and abuse from conservative sections of the society.

**Case 3:** A Brooklyn-based literary blogger/podcaster/personality suddenly began attacking a novelist on Twitter, after she tweeted about his private threats against her. Before the night was over, the blogger had been kicked off Twitter, and several other writers and literary agents had come forward to tell stories of his threatening and bizarre behaviour.

It was the second time this year that this blogger – a longtime fixture of New York's publishing scene, thanks in part to his nine-year relationship with the news editor of the influential Publishers Lunch newsletter – had been the centre of a storm of publishing-world anger and controversy.[5]

### *Survivor/victim of physical assault*

**Case 1:** In 2013, a teenager committed suicide after being raped, photographed by her rapists and bullied out of school.

[3]Drake, M. (2014, 26 July). TOWIE star Lauren Goodger is latest revenge porn victim after sex tape is shared. *Mirror*. www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/towie-star-lauren-goodger-latest-3919046#ixzz39S2f3dYr

[4]Lemieux, J. (2014, 1 April). Jamila Stands. *Ebony*. www.ebony.com/news-views/jamilah-stands-987#axzz2xer4gw1e

[5]Trotter, J. K. (2014, 26 September). The Threatening Meltdown That Got a Book Blogger Kicked Off Twitter. *Gawker*. gawker.com/the-threatening-meltdown-that-got-a-book-blogger-kicked-1639598113

**Case 2:** Gangs in London are putting young women on a list of rape targets and circulating the list to each other using Blackberry Messenger. They are also secretly filming teenage girls in sexual acts and then threatening to upload the footage if the girls don't fulfil their sexual demands.[6]

**Case 3:** A young teenager from Albany, USA, decided to tell how she got involved in a sex nightmare to warn other girls. One winter evening, together with a friend, she accepted the invitation to go secretly to one of her brother's friends' home. She found there were another four boys there. She was invited to drink alcohol and then she doesn't remember what happened. But she was left near her home, in the snow, out in the dark.

"My mother told me she found me outside, left for dead, and when she heard me trying to get to the door, she thought it was a dog scratching. I was weak and could have died in the below freezing temperatures," recalls the young girl.

Next thing she knew, she was in the emergency room getting blood drawn and having various tests done. The doctors examined the rape kit and verified the violation. It was only later that the girl learned that her best friend had been raped, too.

On Twitter and Facebook, she was called a skank and a liar and people encouraged her to kill herself. Twice, she tried to take her own life.

But the girl got lucky when Anonymous got involved in her case. #justice4Daisy has trended on the internet, and pressure has come down hard on the authorities who thought they could hide what really happened.[7]

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[6]Townsend, M. (2014, 19 July). Gangs draw up lists of girls to rape as proxy attacks on rivals. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/19/gangs-rape-lists-sex-assault

[7]Coleman, D. (2013, 18 October). I'm Daisy Coleman, The Teenager At The Center Of The Maryville Rape Media Storm, And This Is What Really Happened. *xoJane*. www.xojane.com/it-happened-to-me/daisy-coleman-maryville-rape?utm_medium=facebook